

Interview #3

Interview of Colonel John A. Des Portes, Commander of the 4080th Strategic Wing, Major C. B. Stratton, General Power, Lt Col A. Leatherwood, and Lt Col J. R. King, 4028th SRWS, by Mr. Ron Caywood, HQ SAC, History, 25 May 1965.

Col Des Portes: Mr. Caywood, before we get into specific questions and particular areas of interest, I'd like to qualify my position on this information and tell you that I've had the wing for almost four years, and of course, I'll be most knowledgeable of things that occurred during that time period. However, it was a period of four years before my time which involved the B-57 aircraft, involved the development of the U-2 and the initial transition of the pilots in the U-2, which I'll ask some of the older people in the wing to come in and fill in for you since I don't have first-hand information on many of those things.

Mr. Caywood: Very good.

Col Des Portes: In my four years with the 4080th, from about 1962 to date, the activities of the wing have actually been the greatest as far as operational commitment is concerned. These operational commitments sort of peaked during late '62, early '63 time period to a point where there were times when there was only

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crews available at home station. So you can see that our commitments have fluctuated considerably during not only photographic legs and electronics intelligence, but we did a lot of sampling during this particular time period. Also, in the last year, this particular program has taken about 80 percent of our combined efforts in the 4080th Wing to keep it running. The amount of effort that is required is really out of proportion when you consider the number of aircraft involved with the U-2 side of the program.

Mr. Caywood: Excuse me, Col Des Portes, now when you mention something that is on a need to know basis, so that we will understand each other, I'm just going to jot down the subject that you mentioned as being on a need to know basis and then later, instead of putting it on this tape, I think you're going to tell me where I can find additional information on this separately, is that right?

Col Des Portes: That's generally correct. That's right.

Mr. Caywood: That will be fine. And then after I jot this down, later when you're through talking, you and I will talk privately and you can just tell me who I need to see or what material to look up?

Col Des Portes: Fine. I noticed from this list of questions or proposed subjects that we talk about the background and requirements for establishing the 4080th Strategic Wing. I'm sure there are people around who were involved with this initial requirement, initial phase-in of the wing, but I don't know who they are. So I'll tell you what I know about it, which I've obtained from official documents as well as other information. In the 1956 time period and 1955, when General Eisenhower was the President of the United States, there was a requirement to obtain information about the Soviet Union. Not that that's not a continuing requirement, but there was almost an emergency requirement for it at that time. And the enemy defenses, Russian that is, at that time were capable of handling aircraft which flew up to b(1) b(1). So it was necessary to develop some system which would get above the enemy defenses. Luckily we're talking about up to about

b(1) b(1) And this little part of the story is in itself a story because Kelly Johnson, widely known in the United States and around the world for his ability to design and develop aircraft, came into the picture at this time with a proposal for just such a vehicle which ultimately became the U-2. And it didn't require him but about seven months from the time he presented the proposal to the authorities in Washington until he had the first U-2 assembled and flying out at what we refer to as the "Ranch," which is a remote area out in the desert here in the west where they transitioned the initial pilots for the U-2 program. And from the outset, of course, there was a lot of secrecy and security surrounding this program, and U-2s were flying for a long time before this was publicly known. And nobody talked much about the U-2s until that infamous day in 1960 when Gary Powers was shot down over Russia in one and then the U-2 became a topic of news media and subject of conversation.

Mr. Caywood: Yes. Col Des Portes, I'd like to interrupt you just a moment. You're a personal friend of Mr. Johnson. Did he ever indicate to you how he had anticipated a need for such an airplane which came at a particularly good time as far as United States' national security is concerned. He certainly seems to be a man who is far-seeing in the requirement for such a vehicle.

Col Des Portes: I never talked to him in too much detail about it. Whether the requirement was established at the Washington level and given to the aircraft industry or whether he had a little foresight in this area, I really don't know. But it's completely apparent and a historical fact that when the requirement became known to him, he came through in a matter of about seven months with a solution to the problem. As you may know, the U-2 was envisioned to be a vehicle that if it made one flight, one operational sortie that is, they would consider that an expendable item. That would have been a successful operation. Then they decided, well, if we put some skids on it, we might be able to recover it with a belly landing. Then they decided, well, why not put a landing gear on it and just see how long we can go with this particular aircraft. Well, the rest of it is history. The aircraft now is some nine years old, and the ^{b(1)} so it's really a rather remarkable accomplishment that something that was built for a one-time effort and here it's doing a real yeoman's job for about nine years.

Mr. Caywood: Well I can tell you Col Des Portes, and what is the individual cost on one of these airplanes and has it changed from the initial prototype up to the present time, and I might add one more question which should follow-on here, has it been a reasonably inexpensive airplane to upkeep?

Col Des Portes: As far as my information is concerned, ^{b(1)}
My understanding is that

I may be wrong on that. I don't have the exact figures. Certainly modifications have taken place over this nine year period. We've developed different systems to go with the aircraft, which in themselves are very expensive, primarily due to the fact that we might have only two or three of a type, and if ever anything is procured on this basis, it's the unit cost out of proportion, but basically the U-2 is the same aircraft that it was at the outset. But we've changed and improved generally the systems it carries to perform its mission. I had the privilege of being in a presentation at SAC when General Power was CINCSAC and he had his staff there, an ASB out of Wright-Pat made a presentation which showed the cost of the U-2 program versus some other programs, and it was completely astounding that there could be so much difference in cost per unit, cost per program, however you want to phrase it. Matter of fact, General Power thought it was fantastic, and I think that's a very appropriate description, what it has cost for what it has given.

Mr. Caywood: Well I couldn't agree with you more, Col Des Portes, because the remarkable intelligence data have paid off dividends throughout the national security point of view that are simply amazing. And of course, one of the finest examples of this is that we were able to document, completely saturate the Soviet threat to the Western Hemisphere in the Cuban situation because of the U-2's intelligence. It seems to me that this is probably one of the finest examples of the minimum outlay of money for the tremendous results.

Col Des Portes: Yes, and let's talk about that Cuban situation. Although I'm not going to discuss all the facets of it, but that in itself was a very fantastic and certainly an interesting experience for all of us who were involved in it. I might just tell you a little bit of the sidelights on how I was involved in it from the outset. One Friday afternoon, specifically it was about, I think it was October 13th, maybe it was October 12th, 1962, and I had left the flight line about 5:30 in the afternoon. Incidentally, I might add that everything that has happened in the 4080th Wing that amounted to anything, always happened on Friday afternoons, just about an hour after normal duty hours. I was at Del Rio, which is Laughlin, and I was in my staff car heading for my quarters and the phone rang. So the operator and everybody else was panicing on the telephone, so I knew that it was a high priority call. It was General Keith Compton from SAC, he was the Director of Operations at that time, and he told me to get certain packages of people together and meet him at Edwards AFB, California, at 5 o'clock the next morning. Well, the telephone call probably took about three or four minutes and I stopped beside the road while I recorded his instructions with pencil and paper. So then as I proceeded to my quarters, the phone rang again. This time it was Major General Jim Wilson, who was Director of Materiel at SAC, and first off he was a little unhappy that he had had to wait about three or four minutes to get me on the phone, and I explained to him it was because I was talking to General Compton. And he gave me some additional instructions, from a materiel standpoint, on what this package was to consist of that we were taking to California. So I called my Battle Staff together and we did some planning, got a little capability which we loaded on a C-54 and we were where we were supposed to be in California, on time, the next morning. It's interesting to note that Major Hyser was lost from there. The events that took place after we got there, not all could be admitted because there was a degree of emergency about this thing and we had a lot of planning and briefing and getting the equipment in shape to make this flight, but we lost him out of California, jumped in General Wilson's airplane and made a beeline for Orlando, McCoy

AFB, and recovered Major Hyser there. It was that sortie, which, as far as I know, kicked off the big issue in Cuba. Of course, Major Anderson, who was with us, we brought him in and he also followed up with his sortie which more or less confirmed what Major Hyser had already picked up. So it was those two pilots who really gave the Air Force and the country the first conclusive evidence on that situation in Cuba.

Mr. Caywood: Tell me, Col Des Portes, on your flight to the California base, what base did you say that was, that was March?

Col Des Portes: No, that was Edwards.

Mr. Caywood: Edwards. You arrived there at 5:00 in the morning. Were there special security procedures taken so that almost anyone was unaware of this, other than the participants and the principles at Headquarters SAC?

Col Des Portes: To my knowledge, that was the only group that knew about this. I told my people, and my wife included, that there was a load of us going to California. I didn't tell her where, just going to California on a little temporary duty. And as far as I know, except for maybe some checks that some people wrote before they ever got home, they might have had a Florida bank stamped on the back of them, they thought we were still in California because we didn't come home for about five weeks.

Mr. Caywood: I see. So then you were actually operating out of Edwards or McCoy?

Col Des Portes: We operated out of McCoy after that first sortie was lost from California. We went out there to pick up an airplane and that's where it was launched from, and we continued our operation out of McCoy.

Mr. Caywood: Did you direct operations yourself then, Col Des Portes, insofar as the U-2 Cuban reconnaissance was concerned from McCoy then?

Col Des Portes: Well, the answer to that is yes, I was the wing commander and the on-the-spot commander, the operating location commander, and I want to add a little here without any malice or anything else, but I would like to add that with the amount of tension that was on this situation at that time, I wouldn't consider myself a commander. I was more of a dispatcher because everybody from the President on down had a hand in this operation. And rightly so, I'm not criticizing it, but I'd be a little remiss if I called myself the commander of that Cuban operation down there because I had plenty of help.

Mr. Caywood: You were carrying out detailed instructions in other words?

Col Des Portes: That's exactly correct.

Mr. Caywood: I'll get back here to these questions on the Cuban crisis because it was an extremely interesting episode in our national security picture during this period. But when you mentioned you had been contacted by telephone from Headquarters SAC on your way to quarters on the afternoon of Friday, do you have direct telephone communications in your car with Headquarters SAC?

Col Des Portes: Well, it's an extension of the base phone system.

Mr. Caywood: Base phone system, but it is connected with your telephone in your staff car?

Col Des Portes: Oh yes, that's what it is.

Mr. Caywood: And I would imagine that you have to maintain unusually acute telephone communications with Headquarters SAC in connection with your job at the 4080th Wing?

Col Des Portes: Well that's correct. That phone right over there is an Autovon hooked right into SAC and although I operate under a numbered air force, whenever a situation of this scope and national significance develops, Headquarters SAC usually operates this detachment directly. I use the Cuban situation as the most outstanding example, and then the operation that we have over in Vietnam is another example, and I might add that even to this day, we're still taking necessary measures because of Cuba and we do that out of b6) Which also is under the direct operational control of SAC.

Mr. Caywood: I understand.

Col Des Portes: While we're talking about that Cuban situation, I'd like to, although much credit has already been given to Major Anderson, posthumously, Major Hyser, and to many of the pilots who carried the load down there, I'd be remiss if I didn't somewhere in here stick the statement to magnify the tremendous job that those people did. There was two to three days hardrunning where I had to use Major Hyser and Major Anderson, and I turned them around every day, and when I did get a capability to substitute for them, they each separately came to me and complained and asked me if they weren't doing a good enough job, why I had to put somebody else in on this thing. Just an example of the devotion, dedication, that those crew have. They're dedicated to their unit, to the mission of SAC, and to their country and even when Major Anderson got shot down, General LeMay

Showed up one afternoon and he told me privately, he said the boys are going to continue to be, will probably continue to be shot at, but we've got a job to do and they're going to have to go. And I want to know if they understand this. Fortunately I'd talked to all of them that morning before General LeMay came in and told them approximately the same thing, and asked them how they felt about it. And to the man they were ready. I told General LeMay this and he seemed pleased that the pilots had that attitude about the situation.

Mr. Caywood: I can understand, Col Des Portes, that you must feel unusually proud to work with men of that caliber. I was talking to Col Jewett before you came into the office this morning, and he was telling me that you usually have a number of applicants at all times that are volunteers for this program.

Col Des Portes: Yes, that's the way we get the pilots for the U-2 program, through a volunteer system. And what I do is, they have to meet certain requirements before they can volunteer and then it's a matter of screening these people through interviews and through records and what not to determine if we feel they are suitable for the program. Make sure that they're not just looking for greener grass, but they're looking for a lot of hard work because that's what it is. It's probably the most demanding crew position in the Air Force, the amount of work that he has put in on one of these sorties.

Mr. Caywood: I want to interrupt for just a moment here Col Des Portes. I imagine because of the U-2 and its unusual mission, it has attracted a lot of attention. You would have some of the initial applicants who were concerned with glamour, probably at first, but I'm sure that you weed those out pretty quickly through determining what is really motivating these people that are volunteering, don't you?

Col Des Portes: Yes, that's the primary purpose of the interview. To try to determine that before we let a man come into the outfit, and I'd like to give credit to the whole program, those who have selected people, for their good judgment, human nature, because they have, I've got some pilots here now who were in the original package nine years ago who are still with us. And I'd like to tell you how they feel. About six to eight months ago when the CINC established a policy of letting people get out of the crew business into staff jobs and what not, he designed this primarily for the bombardment forces. But the Chief of Staff at SAC sent me a message and said how do you feel about crew turnover in the 4080th Wing? Well, we've had a considerable amount

of turnover, people up at staff level who used to be crews and what not, but I called in the old timers, the original ones, and asked them how they felt about getting off the crew? They said "Well, what is the alternative? What would I do if I got off the crew?" And I said, "Well, I've got to have an answer to let higher headquarters know how you feel." They said, "Well, if you've got to take me out of the U-2, then I'll wait for somebody to develop a follow-on to the U-2 and try to get into that," because they didn't want out of the program.

Mr. Caywood: I see. Speaking of that, Col Des Portes, with the development of our follow-on weapon system, that is the SR-71, certainly will be taking over some of the types of missions that the U-2 has been doing, will you be using, or do you foresee using, some of the seasoned U-2 pilots in the SR-71 program?

Col Des Portes: Well, I don't know anything about, specifics about this other program. I may know something, but I'm not at liberty to talk about it. But I would say this, if I had anything to do with it, selecting men from the U-2 program, pilots that is, definitely would go into this SR-71. My reason for that is not only do they deserve it if they want it, and they all want it, but the experience that they've gained, developed, with high altitude reconnaissance is something that any follow-on program of that type should certainly have at the outset. There's no substitute for that experience. Primarily it requires the wearing of pressure suits, operating almost as a single individual, at the conditions of high altitude, high speed, and what not. These people are professionals at it and to deny them that opportunity, and to deny that program this experience, I think would be tragic.

Mr. Caywood: Yes, I can certainly see the background in your thinking. If you can answer this question for me, Col Des Portes, if not I'll make a note of it, but to your knowledge, has any other nation developed a program of similarity to the U-2?

Col Des Portes: Not that I know of. You know as much about speculation as I do. I read Aviation News and things like that where they tried to develop what they called the Usty Twosty, Russian equivalent of the U-2, which was a twin engine, glider wing-type of aircraft. but I know of no such aircraft. I think if one exists, well I don't know of it.

Mr. Caywood: This program, as far as you know, is unique in military circles today?

Col Des Portes: Yes sir, it certainly is. We don't have as many U-2s now as we should have because we busted some of them up. Some of our accidents should never have taken place, but nevertheless

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Some of these were operational losses which we can explain due to enemy action and what not, but in my opinion the U-2 has an indefinite future. I mean by that there are a lot of people that feel that it's served its purpose and its death knell is near, but I don't agree with that. I think that the U-2 has the capability that this country, the Air Force and this country, can certainly benefit from for an indefinite period of time, because it's versatile. From a logistics standpoint, we developed a capability over the years that we can respond quickly with a small package, almost any place, and get the job done. And in my opinion, it's going to be several years ahead where this capability will certainly have a place in the requirements of this country.

Mr. Caywood: Col Des Portes, this would be particularly useful and required until United States' technology advances further in the field of space satellites, wouldn't you agree?

Col Des Portes: Yes, I'll agree to that.

Mr. Caywood: Or do you think there'll still be a continuing requirement even after the space reconnaissance satellite become sophisticated and are carrying on worthwhile work?

Col Des Portes: Well, I'm speaking from ignorance here because I don't know enough about projected capability in the space field. I heard Walter Cronkite on television the other night talk about the launching coming up in July of a space system that would make the pictures of the U-2s look like amateur work. Well, I hope that this is true. It would be a great achievement, but I haven't seen it yet. I don't know of this capability, and I still believe that there will be isolated spots on this globe where a U-2 will have a very definite advantage. You know, weather is always a factor in photography. I know there are certain types of photography, the more exotic systems, which can penetrate clouds, but it doesn't give you a plain old everyday photograph. Although the U-2 is designed to operate above the majority of the weather, there are certain sky conditions which might be covered with a U-2 where a satellite might not be able to cover the same situation. You're going to have to put a lot of satellites up to cover the entire globe.

Mr. Caywood: Yes, I had a question here which you probably haven't seen earlier in regard to the flexibility of the U-2. Do you think it can be used to photograph, for useful purposes, such things as natural disasters like the Alaskan earthquake or the recent floods. Does it have a purpose here for other than plain military requirements?

Col Des Portes: Oh yes, the U-2 can do all of those things. We photographed the Alaskan earthquake, along with the B-58, and we photographed the United States, I would say several times since I've been in the wing, in support of the RBS program for SAC. It certainly has that type of capability.

Mr. Caywood: One other question. I had noticed that many countries which lack a sophisticated radar system, especially maybe in Latin America and in some of the Asiatic countries. Would you advocate the use of the U-2 to get photography of those nations, even though they were unaware of it, and they would not need to know that our American military had achieved such data, would you advocate the use of the U-2 for these purposes?

Col Des Portes: If this country has a requirement for intelligence that is not in existence, over these types of areas, I think the U-2 is the system to get it for them. Now, thus far you see, we've concentrated on the photographic capability. Still,

once again,

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The system that we have, the is one we're testing right now which is called the this aircraft has a fantastic capability for electronic intelligence.

Mr. Caywood: While we are discussing some of the personal aspects of the U-2, that is the crewmen, Col Des Portes, I wonder if you'd mind going over some details perhaps of the accidents that have occurred, those that you mentioned being lost as a result of enemy action or through general operational procedures. I think that would be of a great deal of interest here, maybe something that hasn't been related before. Personal experience, perhaps, that the pilots have had.

Col Des Portes: I'll tell you about the accidents that have occurred during my tour as wing commander and then I'm going to let the records sort of speak for those that happened previous to my tour with the wing. We were going along in good shape in 1961, and then, I think it was January 3d, 1962, on a routine night flight out of Del Rio, Major Stratton, who is now my wing standboard, was over the Mississippi/Louisiana area and about

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when, without any warning, his aircraft pitched violently nose up, and we subsequently attributed this pitch to a b(1). Nevertheless, the pitch was of such severity that it caused b(1). One thing about the U-2, it's got what they call a faired and a gust position. This relates to setting of flaps and ailerons. You can go faster indicated air-speed-wise in the gust position than you can in the faired position. Unless we're in turbulent air or expect to penetrate weather,

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Kelly Johnson educated me along these lines, that's why I know about it. If you're b(1)

Well, he was in the faired position. After we constructed the events, we know that the horizontal stabilizer failed, and he went into an uncontrollable spin. The rotation of the spin was increasing to the extent that he was losing consciousness. He thought that he ejected. He knew in his own mind that he ejected and it was only when we showed him the ejection seat still in the cockpit of his crashed aircraft that he was convinced that he didn't eject but he couldn't explain why not. He was actually thrown from the aircraft. He recovered his consciousness, which was caused by this excessive spinning of his body, and in the middle of the night, all of the sudden, he landed suspended in a tree. This was the time of year where the rivers in Mississippi and Louisiana were flooded. Fortunately for him, he landed in a tree, because there was a regular ocean flowing through the swamp where he landed. He didn't know it at the time that he landed in the tree, so he took off his outer helmet, the metal helmet that covers his pressure suit helmet, and dropped it. It was so dark and everything, he figured he'd see how far he was from the ground. To hear him tell it, it's pretty interesting, but he said he turned that helmet loose but he waited and he waited and he waited and finally he heard a splash. So he figured the best course of action was to stay in that tree and he very efficiently got his survival kit out, took his radio and started transmitting to rescue forces trying to pinpoint where he was, and it worked out very good. A rescue helicopter heard his transmission and located him in the general area. They couldn't pinpoint him in those trees in that swamp and it wasn't until daylight that they were able to get in to him. And this in itself was an interesting little story, because people like you and myself, well maybe not you, but myself more than you, because I came from the country and I know a little bit about the swamps,

but the highway patrol and people that were concentrating on his location, were unable to penetrate this swamp until they ran into an old cajon down there with one of these dug-out logs that they call pelos, and he got in that pelo and took him through the quick sand and everything else, and got him in there and said "there's your boy in that tree up there." So by using ropes and what not, well they got Major Stratton down and were very fortunate that he wasn't injured in any way and he was just really covered with luck throughout this whole escapade.

Mr. Caywood: Something like this, Col Des Portes, what was Major Stratton's reaction? Did this affect his enthusiasm for the program or did he chalk this up as one of those difficult experiences and is he still on active duty with you?

Col Des Portes: Absolutely. He's still with us and he responded in a most magnificent fashion and his first concern was, of course, did he do anything that caused the accident? What actually did cause the accident? He contributed very much to the actual investigation. Because of his attitude, and we put him back to flying at his own insistence at an early date, and he's been with me, doing a real yeoman's job ever since. Matter of fact, since we're talking about this particular pilot, I'll tell you something else that happened to him. He was over San Antonio one morning on a flight out of Laughlin and an oil leak developed in the engine or an oil line broke, caused the loss of all the engine oil, the engine ceased, quit, which meant he had no chance of a relight. He had a dead stick situation. He could either bail out or he could try to sit this airplane down. Well, he was about 65,000 feet over San Antonio and he was extremely heavy because he'd taken off with a full load of fuel and had just completed his climb to altitude, and was about 140-60 miles from Del Rio, and he glided that airplane back to Del Rio and made a beautiful dead stick landing. Once again this is indicative of the type of crews we have in this outfit.

Mr. Caywood: Well that's right. I believe you said he's now on standboard which is one of your very responsible positions, isn't it?

Col Des Portes: That's right. He takes his time on operating locations, and, matter of fact he's leaving tomorrow for Vietnam. I want to get you to talk to him before he leaves because he is one of two people that I still have in the wing who are knowledgeable on the B-57 program.

Mr. Caywood: Very good.

Col Des Portes: Now, the next accident that we had was just a couple of months after Major Stratton's, and I'll try to cautiously word this one, but I selected Captain John Campbell to go out to the west coast and to receive some training on the inflight refueling system which was being incorporated in about three of the 4080th aircraft. They had some people out there who had experimented with this system. We lost Captain Campbell out there. One night on a night flight, apparently he became involved with the jet wash from a KC-135 tanker which was refueling him, and the right wing of the aircraft gave way, it broke. And he was in this gust position that I referred to earlier. At that time our escape system was not too good. And he tried to extricate himself from the aircraft but he was at relatively low altitude, something under 30,000 feet and we found him half in and half out of the cockpit which means he was in the process of extricating himself from the aircraft when it crashed. Now it took us about two or three days, two days it was, to find that aircraft. We had so many false leads that we chased before we found him so close to a base that he'd taken off from. This one caused a little bit of concern on account of security. Where he was was a classified location, and what he was doing was classified. When the press first contacted me and asked me if I'd lost a U-2, I told him no. It wasn't very long before the press intercepted a broadcast by a rescue unit on the west coast and they got Captain Campbell's name. So they found out from me that I did have a Captain Campbell assigned and they were pretty nasty about it. This has been a ticklish situation all the way along in this unit, trying to play fair with the press and yet trying to maintain security. While I'm talking about it, before I forget it, should anything ever come of this information on the 4080th that you're in the process of recording here for the histories and what not, I want it well known that there's a man in Del Rio, Texas, who's in the newspaper business. His name is Sam Bus and he not only has pictures and news stories, and this type of business about the seven-year history of the 4080th at Del Rio, but he was as good a friend of the wing as we ever had in the news media because he knew things that he would never publish unless we gave him the okay. He really was a friend of ours in this regard. And if anybody does ever try to write the history of the 4080th Wing, I think in all fairness to him, as well as to add credence to the information that goes into this history or story, he ought to be contacted. And he has pictures of his own that I'm sure are not in existence anywhere else.

Mr. Caywood: I'd certainly agree.

Col Des Portes: My next accident, I'm wandering around so much here, but my next accident was Major Anderson, Major Rudolf Anderson, who was shot down on the 16th of October, I believe it was, over Cuba. That was my first operational loss, or loss over an enemy situation. I'm sure that the story on Major Anderson is well documented in the history and as well in the press. I would like to add at this time that I have to put a little pressure on business in here. Major Anderson and myself both came from the same part of the country and we both went to the same college. A matter of five or six years difference in our ages, and his loss meant a lot to me because I considered him not only one of my better pilots, but he was a personal friend of mine because I had something in common with him. And it was real gratifying to see that, not only the nation recognized him posthumously so well, but also the city of Greenville, South Carolina, dedicated a park to him. There was a school in Alaska, where he was TDY up there many times with OL-3 at Eielson, and they named a school for him up there. This same man down in Del Rio that I talked about is trying to get a youth center named for him down there. It's not a substitute for life, but it at least is gracious recognition for a man who did something.

Mr. Caywood: By the way, have you had an opportunity to talk to his, did he have a son by the way?

Col Des Portes: Yes, he had two little boys, and then Mrs. Anderson had a baby girl several months after his death.

Mr. Caywood: I recall that. Were his sons old enough to understand the sacrifice their father made?

Col Des Portes: Well, not fully. They're too young. At the ceremony the oldest, young Rudy, he seemed to be impressed by the ceremony, but the little one, the smaller boy, went to sleep in his grandmother's lap and slept through the whole ceremony. They were just too young and I'm sure that as they get a little older they'll certainly realize because history will record for them what sacrifice their daddy made.

Mr. Caywood: Are you at liberty, Col Des Portes, to state how the widow felt when she, did she react to this in a way that she understood her great loss, to realize that he had died for a very worthwhile cause?

Col Des Portes: I'm going to very politely avoid that question. Mrs. Jane Anderson is a very fine lady. She took this thing exceptionally hard and the Surgeon's Office at SAC and the Assistant Chief of Staff's Office can give you information on this any time you might need it. Being fair to Mrs. Anderson, as far as I know, she is getting

along alright now with her three children down in Georgia. The next accident we had was also involved with the Cuba situation but wasn't due to any enemy action. Captain Joe Hyde was returning from a mission over Cuba, operating out of Barksdale, and some 60 miles north of Key West, northwest of Key West over the Gulf of Mexico, his aircraft was observed to come down at almost a phenomenal rate of descent, something like 25,000 feet per minute, and he crashed in the Gulf, and although we recovered practically every bit of the aircraft, we were never able to locate Captain Hyde's body. He obviously ejected at a low altitude and we never were able to recover his body. And his wife also had a child after his death and she has visited with my wife and myself with the baby, since his accident, and is a very remarkable lady, and has returned to her profession of teaching music and school in Jackson, Mississippi. She sends me pictures of the little boy frequently and I'm sure he's going to be just like his daddy. Looks like him, and if he turns out like him, he's going to be a fine man.

Mr. Caywood: So in other words, Col Des Portes, your pilots here in the U-2 program, they seem to have families that share their sense of mission here?

Col Des Portes: Absolutely! The wives and dependents of these men deserve one dickens of a lot of credit because of the number of years that they have played this game. I say game, it's not a game, it's a real serious business, but they've gone along with security restrictions in a most commendable manner. Manys a time when one of these pilots had to go home and pack his bag and tell his wife goodbye, and he couldn't even mention to her which direction he was going.

Mr. Caywood: He probably couldn't tell her how long he'd be gone either.

Col Des Portes: In many cases that was true and they've held up remarkably well under this type of life. It's not a natural type of life for an American wife, but these people have really been tremendous. They accept it, they might not like it, but they accept it, and they make the best of things. They take care of each other and they support their husbands all the way, cause the husband can't do a job unless his wife and family are supporting him in this way and they've just been tremendous all the way through.

Mr. Caywood: Well I imagine, Col Des Portes, that you have a very close knit fraternal spirit here among the U-2 pilots. In other words, when one of the U-2 pilots is away on a

mission, those who remain here certainly are concerned and give any help they can to their colleague's wife and family.

Col Des Portes: That's exactly true. And I might point out that this is not only is true of the pilots, although they are the ones that carry the load, the maintenance people maintaining their equipment and there are other people supporting them too. Flight surgeons, physiological support, personnel, air police, cooks, and all sorts of support people, and navigators who plan their missions, and they're all in a group and this is what I've been talking about in the way of dependent attitude and performance over a period certainly applies to all of them. And there's been very few cases, remarkably low number of cases, where I have had to myself become involved in assisting any of these people. They've had a very wonderful attitude about helping each other and it's been a most fantastic record, really.

Mr. Caywood: In other words, the esprit de corps in the 4080th Wing has been exceptional across the board you would say?

Col Des Portes: I'd say that without reservation. Certainly it's been the best unit from a morale standpoint that I've ever been associated with. And you can attribute it to many factors because morale is a general subject made up of many factors, but primarily it's because they do things, they know, they have a sense of accomplishment, they can see the results of some of the things that they do and from this standpoint, I would like to say that this has made my job easier maintaining morale, I'm fortunate that we're in a position to see that you've accomplished things. It's easier to sell people on a mission and develop esprit de corps and . . .

Mr. Caywood: Well, let me ask you just one more question. This line, Col Des Portes, is because of the sensitivity of your 4080th mission, very little credit can be given to your work publicly. The fact that your pilots and all the others working assisting them realize the part that they play in a great national mission has somewhat been a good substitute for the fact that you can't publicize their work, which it certainly should be publicized, but can't be for sensitive reasons.

Col Des Portes: That's correct. That's why I hope that someday, at the appropriate time when the authorities feel that it's possible, that this thing can be downgraded or released, attempt to give them credit although it will be after the fact. They'll be able to tell their families, their friends, a little bit about what they did. I think that they deserve it and I hope that that can be accomplished in the not too distant time.

Mr. Caywood: Yes. I'd like to get back to one question, Col Des Portes, in regard to Major Anderson. Could you comment, based on your knowledge, any additional information that might be of interest here as to how he was knocked down. There have been some conflicting reports in the press and I'm sure we have much information documented in classified ways, but could you comment on that?

Col Des Portes: Well, as far as I'm concerned, based on information that is available to me, b(1) The Cubans launched, or the Russians, I don't know who fired the shot, I imagine the Russians fired it, but from Cuba

b(1)

fashion that some of the shrapnel penetrated the canopy in the cabin of the aircraft and also penetrated portions of his pressure suit. The rest is pure medical summary of what would happen at that altitude. If your pressure suit is made to fail, which this shrapnel did, and you lose your cabin pressure, which was the case here, you don't live but a matter of, just a couple of seconds. What you do is your lungs explode on you. Your body explodes. So there's no question in our minds that Major Anderson was killed instantly.

Mr. Caywood: Col Des Portes, out of the tragic accidents that have occurred, including that of Major Anderson, in retrospect have these helped you later in your operations, the data received from them?

Col Des Portes: Well, we try to learn all we can from these accidents, and we try to prevent their recurrence. But, they have not necessarily followed a pattern. One thing that we have accomplished as a result of a couple of them,

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They used to ride on what they called a cold seat. In other words, the only way you could get out was to unhook yourself and your equipment, open the cabin and hope you could crawl out or be thrown out. Then we got a hot seat, an ejection seat, and the first man that bailed out of it was [he's now a Lt Coll], Chief of Training, Wally Meyers, and he was at relatively low altitude over the Del Rio area and he had a fire in the cockpit. He bailed out with his ejection seat. But we later found out that if you remove the canopy before you fire the seat, and we found out from a subsequent accident that this canopy when it's cooled at altitude, I would have thought it would become more brittle, but that is not the case, it becomes flexible and when you fire the seat without releasing the canopy, the charge is displaced by the bending canopy and you're trapped in there. So through

a series of these occurrences, we finally have a real escape system. To continue on this accident business, the next loss was one a b61 when he bailed out over Mountain Home. He sustained a little back injury, the aircraft was totally destroyed, and it was at this time that Washington released the information that the 4080th was and had been training nationalist foreign students. We still treat the thing as Secret in fairness to the individuals because when you publish the names, I am told that this puts them in an awful bad position because the Chinese Reds, the Communist, will take reprisal action against their families who are over on the Chinese mainland. So in fairness to these guys, we still try to keep it secret. But it's a public fact, a known fact, that we train foreign nationals. Matter of fact,

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This time he wasn't injured at all, he got his butt full of cactus, but other than that, he wasn't injured at all. But the press really tore into us about this one Chinaman who had wrecked two U-2s and said the price of them was about nine million dollars. I don't know where they got their cost figures, but of course, that's really beside the point. We feel about as bad about losing an airplane as anybody, and it's unfortunate that they took this attitude. So every time anything happens with a U-2, they always go back and recount Captain Chang's two accidents. Now in between his two accidents, I was overseas at the time with one of my OLs, Major Primrose, who is one of our old crews, had almost a thousand hours in a U-2, crashed on an approach to Davis-Monthan, off the runway 30 out there. He was killed instantly. Another aircraft totally destroyed. That brings you up to date from 1961 to date on U-2 accidents, unfortunately there's been just too many of them, but for the sake of the record, we'll talk about them, and later on in this thing we'll go back and talk about those that happened before 1961.

Mr. Caywood: Col Des Portes, while you're talking about the training of foreign nationals, do you train other foreign nationals, in addition to the Chinese, in the U-2 program?

Col Des Portes: Yes, b61 Matter of fact on one of these accidents, you'll see where one of the fatalities was an RAF pilot. That happened back in the early days of the program. It was Squadron Leader Christensen. July 1958.

Mr. Caywood: Is he the only foreign national pilot that's been a fatality in the U-2 program that you know of?

Col Des Portes: Yes, that's the only one that I know of. That gets us around to the story which I mentioned to you a while ago that I'll try to relate for the sake of this tape, about this Chinese nationalist who was flying out of Del Rio on a night training mission and he was up over Colorado. The weather was pretty bad over the mountains, but of course, he was above the weather but there wasn't much choice of landing fields for him and he flamed out. So these people are trained not to come back unless they come back with their airplane, so they're a little bit hesitant about bailing out. This may not sound too consistent since Captain Chang bailed out twice, but the majority of them don't believe in bailing out. He looked down and found a what we call a sucker hole in the cloud, and he could see a light on the ground some 60,000 feet below him. So he spiraled down through this hole and discovered that the light on the ground was associated with a small emergency FAA landing strip. So he dead sticked his U-2 onto this Rocky Mountain strip down there, disconnected his equipment, opened his aircraft, and there was a little radio shack on the edge of the field, like on all such fields, with one single operator there running his equipment. So he walks over, knocks on the door in the middle of the night. I wasn't there, I can't relate what kind of expression that the operator must have had at that time, but the look at a slanted-eyed, darker skinned than usual individual with a pressure suit on whose only words in English were maximum security, maximum security. It must have been a real trying ordeal, and I've often wondered if that radio operator has been a normal person since then. Let's knock it off here.

Col Des Portes: Mr. Caywood, since we've had a little break here in this recording, and in consideration of the fact that Major Charles B. Stratton, Chief of my U-2 Standboard is present here and fixing to leave for overseas tomorrow, I'm going to take a few minutes of his time and let him talk a little bit about the B-57 part of the 4080th's history since I'm a little bit lacking in knowledge in that particular program.

Mr. Caywood: Real good.

Col Des Portes: Chuck, you can say anything you want to up to Top Secret here without any reservations, anything that might be a little involved about some of your actual operations we may put some restrictions on, but would you mind, just in your own words, tell us how the B-57 part of the program got started, where they formed it, and how you trained and a few things like this?

Major Stratton: Yes sir. I first heard of the B-57 program in about the spring of 1956, when we were notified in the old 508th Fighter Wing that they were going to disband that wing, the 508th, and form the 4080th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing at Turner Air Force Base, at Albany, Georgia. The initial group that started the B-57 program was already at Lockbourne, correction, at Martin Company in Baltimore, Maryland, at this time working with the new RB-57D and checking people out in the B-57C. Those of us who met the requirements for entry into the program, I've forgotten the amount of flying time but there was a minimum amount of flying time, and a minimum amount of jet time, went to Carswell Air Force Base to receive our pressure suits. After fitting at Carswell, we made our original runs in the chamber at Wright-Patterson. And then we went to Martin Company in Baltimore, Maryland, to receive the ground school on the B-57C as well as the RB-57D. There were three types of the RB-57D, the D zero was a photoreconnaissance aircraft, the D one, of which they only made on D one, was a high resolution radar type of a thing, and the D two, they made six of the D twos, six or seven, I've forgotten exactly which, was ECM. There were thirteen of the D zeros, the photoreconnaissance type. After checkout in the 57C at Martin, and some of the people checked out on the 57D at Martin, we came back and formed the wing at Turner and began to slowly receive our RB-57D zeros. The first operational deployment of the RB-57D was in the fall of 1956, where a contingent of, I think, three aircraft went to Yokota on the command of Col Dan Mahoney. This group was augmented with another airplane in December of '56 and also in November of '56 a detachment went to Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska, two aircraft, but they only stayed there for approximately ten days, did nothing at work, and returned to Turner Air Force Base. In the spring of, well late winter, early spring of 1957, the group at Yokota was rotated, the troops that is, the aircraft stayed, they kept three aircraft over there and changed the crews and all of the personnel. They stayed six months.

Mr. Caywood: Excuse me, Major Stratton, could you get into some detail as to your operations there in the Far East? Some of your actual accomplishments? And maybe some details as to how these were carried out.

Major Stratton: When I was there we practiced for aerial reconnaissance work. We made photoreconnaissance runs all up and down the island of Japan in that area and that was the extent of the operation that I was involved in for seven months at Yokota, from February of '57 through about September I think it was, of '57.



Mr. Caywood: Were these purely photographic missions? Or did you have other . . .

Major Stratton: Our mission was photoreconnaissance and we just practiced staying proficient in this type of work on the island of Japan.

Mr. Caywood: I see.

Major Stratton: That's the only work that we did while I was there. Now the first detachment, the first group, I'm not too familiar with their operations, what they did. When we terminated our TDY, in the latter part of 1957, we brought the aircraft home, the D zeros home, and closed that shop. And we never went back to the Far East again with the RB-57Ds. The 57-D had a refueling capability, the receptacle located on top of the fuselage, the D one . . .

Mr. Caywood: What type of aircraft did you use for refueling at . . .

Major Stratton: The KC-97 and occasionally the KB-29.

Mr. Caywood: What were some of the operational characteristics of the RB-57D when you were there flying, what were your usual speeds and . . .

Major Stratton: Our true airspeed was approximately Mach .74, b(1)

Mr. Caywood: Did you have any operational problems? Were your operations there very successful or how would you compare. . .

Major Stratton: Very, very successful. The aircraft was extremely reliable.

Mr. Caywood: Yes, and you had no particular problems insofar as safety measures, and think. . .

Major Stratton: The airplane had an extremely low maximum airspeed. I've forgotten exactly, but I believe that the maximum limiting airspeed of the aircraft was b(1) That was the maximum, I believe, if I'm not mistaken. It was lower than the U-2. One of the unique things, one problem we did have was the wings would leak. They were honeycomb-type large panels with a channel between each panel where you squirted a sealant in this channel and occasionally they would leak. That's the only problem I recall of having with the aircraft.

Mr. Caywood: Did you encounter any incidents or any type of hostility?

Major Stratton: No, it's like I said, we never operated out of the islands.

Mr. Caywood: I see.

Major Stratton: During my stay with the group.

Col Des Portes: Let me interrupt here for just a moment. Most of this is hearsay with me because it was before my time. But did you have any wing problems other than the accident I've heard so much about on Bob Schoula when he landed and the tower called him and told him his wing had just fallen off?

Major Stratton: No sir. Up until this time we had no idea that we were having this problem of stress corrosion, is what caused it, the bending of the wing at a point where the spar split and went over the engine and came to one piece again outboard of the engine. If this corner reflection of the wing had separated, as I understand, the molecules in metal and not the corrosion had started in there and weakened the wing so that, when this aircraft touched down, the wing separated there at the engine. Upon inspection after this, we found that there were several that had this problem. And then, of course, we took them back to the Martin Company and they ran a test program where they put instrumentation on this part of the wing and they came up with a modification to beef up this area. And all of our aircraft made one-time flights back to either Glen L. Martin or Warner Robins RAMA Air Materiel Depot and they put a modification in this area.

Mr. Caywood: Did that involve the D model?

Major Stratton: It involved not only the 57D, but the D zero, D one and D two. They had a larger wing than the U-2. The wingspan was, I've forgotten exactly, it was in the neighborhood of, well, I'm not sure, 104 or 110 feet, I believe. I've forgotten exactly.

Col Des Portes: Incidentally, that part of the program was where this insignia and name of Black Knight came from. The B-57 was the Black Knight, b(1)

b(1) In our wing insignia you see this Black Knight on there, well that was symbolic of the B-57 part of the activity.

Mr. Caywood: I was going to ask, would Major Stratton have been involved with b(1) in connection with the RB-57 activities?

Major Stratton: This name, do you remember, it's been so long.

Col Des Portes: That was probably, and I don't know this, before he went to Japan when Dan Maloney had the outfit over there, Chuck.

Mr. Caywood: The first group?

Col Des Portes: The first group. I don't know, I'm not positive of this, but I believe that's when it was.

Major Stratton: Our D twos did deploy

b(1)

but I was not a part of that program.

Mr. Caywood: Was it Incirlik? Or do you know?

Major Stratton: I'm not sure. I don't recall.

Col Des Portes: If I can get Col King, he was on that and he can fill in if you can remember to ask that question. There was another interlude associated with that, coming home with some support airplanes and had to bail out over Italy. A C-119.

Major Stratton: Well, the program, after the U-2 came into the picture, began to slow down considerably as far as deploying the aircraft. The only deployments we had was we brought our D zeros back from Japan with the D twos to the Middle East. And in 1959, early '59, they began to break up the squadron by sending first of all the D zeros, part of them went to Germany, ARDC got a few of them, and I'm not sure where the rest of them all went, but the b(1) were scattered, they broke up this part of the squadron, sent them to Germany and gave some to ARDC and I don't know who else got them. Some, I think, came out here to Davis-Monthan to go into salvage, storage depot.

b(1)

And the D twos, they were last, they stayed with the squadron the longest. And then they, I believe those all came out there to the salvage depot after they did completely dissolve the squadron.

Col Des Portes: Chuck, you might make mention here of how a group of you then switched over into the U-2 program.

Major Stratton: That's correct. Those of us that volunteered and met the requirements for the U-2 program, were asked if we would like to come down to the other squadron. I've forgotten exactly the number. There were quite a few in the squadron that did go down and move from the RB-57D into the U-2 and the transition was not too difficult because the same pressure suit was worn and altitude handling once in the air were not too different

once you had the aircraft at altitude.

b(1)

Mr. Caywood: About how long did this last? Do you recall?

Major Stratton: No, I'm not exactly sure what period in 1958 that this did take place.

Col Des Portes: How long did it take?

Major Stratton: The best I recall is about three or four months. I think approximately four months.

Mr. Caywood: Quite extensive.

Major Stratton: Yes, they were there for the entire period of tests. And another thing, in 1958 we gave, we took two airplanes to Taiwan, the RB-57D zeros and b(1) b(1) I took one of them over and Major Reginald Petty took the other one over.

Mr. Caywood: Yes, did you assist any way in the training there?

Major Stratton: Yes, we did. Not there. They came to Laughlin. We checked out, I believe, a total of five or six of their pilots, of the Chinese pilots, at Laughlin and then we took two of the airplanes over to them.

Mr. Caywood: Did you participate personally in the training of these Nationalist Chinese?

Major Stratton: Yes. Oh yes, I took two of them all the way through their training from original checkout in the 57C all the way to their completing their training in the D.

Mr. Caywood: Could you tell me, Major Stratton, some of your experiences in training the Nationalist Chinese? Are they apt pupils?

Major Stratton: The ones that I had there at Laughlin in the 57D had no problem at all in the checkout of the aircraft. Most all of their flying time had been in single engine fighter aircraft, but we had no trouble at all in the checkout program. They went through the program smoothly, very gliden.

Mr. Caywood: About how long a program is this? What would you say the that time was from the time they came until they reached proficiency and could return?



Major Stratton: I would guess approximately two months. Two, maybe three, no more than three.

Mr. Caywood: Does this compare to about the same length of time of training of American pilots?

Major Stratton: Yes, they went through the program the same as one of our pilots did.

Mr. Caywood: You would consider them on par ability with American pilots as far as proficiency in this aircraft? Or would you not?

Col Des Portes: I would like to inject one thing right here, and that is people who come over here, to begin with, you have a language problem, a language barrier. And there are many, I say many, I don't know how many, but during World War II we trained many Chinese pilots at USAF training schools. The requirement was to be fluent in English and they've gotten American training. The majority of these people who have come back over here since for training with the 4080th Wing had training in the United States as a basis for their ratings, you see. And they have flown fighter aircraft since, so to a degree, depending on the fluency of their language, it was almost like talking to, well it is, an American trained man. And they are hand-picked and those people are pretty well selected before they come over here.

Major Stratton:

b(1)

Col Des Portes: Yes. I've mentioned, I put a story in here about you about the night you bailed out in that tree, and b(1) b(1) So go ahead and talk about it.

Major Stratton:

b(1) wasn't equal to the U-2, it wouldn't go quite as high. b(1) I never saw one any higher than that. Normally, at the termination of mission, you'd be just over 64,000.

Col Des Portes:

b(1)

Mr. Caywood: By the way, Col Des Portes, do you have any information on the effectiveness of the RB-57 operation? Or the U-2 operations? After they have been in the inventory of the Nationalist Chinese?

Col Des Portes: No, you can get that information, I'm sure, from the Director of Intelligence at SAC. I have received briefings, my people did, on the results of some of

their activity over there. But to get the details on it, we don't maintain it here and I'd hate to try to quote it.

Mr. Caywood: Yes sir.

Major Stratton: The b(1) was designed, it's amazing that the altitude of the D two and the D zero, the ECM version which carried two people, the pilot and an electronics countermeasures operator, it had the same approximately, very close, same basic weight and the same maximum altitude even though it carried much more equipment and another crewmember. Because of difference in design, the center section of the fuselage and the wing center section, they eliminated considerable weight by redesign of this netter, which made them very close to the same altitude capability and weight, the redesign of the D two over the D zero.

Mr. Caywood: In your experiences with aircraft, Major Stratton, would you say that you prefer operating one over the other? I'm speaking of the RB-57 models and the U-2.

Major Stratton: RB-57D was a much more comfortable aircraft to fly because it had a larger cockpit. You wasn't crammed in it, so to speak, as much as you are in the U-2 because the cockpit is much smaller. But overall, I'd much rather fly the U-2 than the D model. It had higher altitude to begin with, it did the job much better, and when I say that, the equipment carried on board the aircraft is much better. The cameras on the 57D zero were, I guess you might say inventory cameras, they had been used on different type aircraft and they just weren't the quality that the U-2 is and it didn't have range, nor did it have the altitude. The only purpose of trying to get the 57D over the U-2 is that it is more comfortable.

Mr. Caywood: In the overall intelligence that you received, the U-2 is definitely superior in quality of product and also in greater detail?

Major Stratton: I think that I would say yes. No question.

Col Des Portes: While we have Major Stratton here, I'd like to cover one other important event that took place in the spring of 1964. Talk a little about it because he was one of the three pilots that effected this as far as I'm concerned, the most significant sort of the record-breaking event.

Mr. Caywood: Col Des Portes, would you mention the other two men at this time?

Col Des Portes: Yes, Major Hyser was one and Major Mackelmoore the other gentleman. We maintain, at all times, a standby capability for this inflight refueling that I told you about. We had three airplanes that were modified for inflight refueling and we maintain proficiency and presence of duty status on two pilots at all times so that they could respond to quick operational commitment. It was a coincidence that there in February, when this operational requirement came up, that I had three pilots here who were proficient and available at inflight refueling, and it was also a coincidence that I happened to have the b(1) aircraft here because our requirement was only to maintain two b(1)

b(1) it was just a coincidence that we had three crews and three aircraft of the refueling configuration. So late one evening I got a telephone call placing the 4080th Wing on alert, and a message that would be coming down that would require deployment of the package, three aircraft, to the Far East, and said that this thing would probably happen within the hour. Well it did happen. I got a message which established E hour as one hour prior to my receiving the alleged phone call. So within an hour I had these three gentlemen on crew rest. Sent them home and told them to go to bed, take a sleeping pill. Because I had to observe the 12 hour crew rest at a time period that we go by. And on the basis of this crew rest, I established takeoff time 15 hours from that particular time, which would have been the following morning. Then we got busy with preparing the support package and getting the schedule worked out with the support aircraft and what not. We selected three separate pilots who were not inflight refueling qualified necessarily, put them on crew rest to take off the following morning. And 9 o'clock the next morning, we took the three pilots who were not qualified for inflight refueling, put them in the aircraft and launched to Hickam. And the tanker aircraft, KC-135, which actually was a communications platform, a rescue aircraft for us under deployment, was also going to be our aerial tanker for support of this thing. So I put three mattresses on the floor-board of that KC-135, told Stratton and Hyser and Mackelmoore to take another sleeping pill because they were going to take them from Hickam on in. Which they did. It's only about a seven hour flight from here to Hickam. They arrived there, we gave them about two hours turnaround time. Col McCasmand, my Deputy Commander of Operations, was in charge of this thing and he turned them around, I think it took two hours and ten or twenty minutes, because we ran into a little ground handling situation over there, but they launched, and the way we do this, of course, is the accompanying type of aircraft lands first. And they

jump out with the pogos and they cover the U-2s and after the U-2s launch, they pick up the pogos, and launch last you see. Arrive first and take off last.

b(1)

some feel for the amount of fatigue that's involved, particularly after you extend yourself past the fifth hour in one of these things

b(1)

b(1) And they were in their suits more than fourteen hours, considering their pre-briefing and post-flight part of it. Now the requirement was to get this package into the Philippines, have it operational within a period of 40 hours.

Mr. Caywood: From the time that you left the ZI?

Col Des Portes: From the time that I got my telephone call and actually it was from the time that E hour had been established which was a while before I got my telephone call. Well, they made it in 30 something, just shy of 38 hours. They were in place and the three pilots who had first flown from Davis-Monthan to Hickam were then in a position to get in the aircraft and launch the operational prefices. So I can't say that this is typical of a U-2 deployment, but I think it's indicative of the capabilities that's been developed with fast deployment over a period of years. But this was actually the most outstanding example that I can think of of such a deployment, a little red package as smoothly as that and in that period of time. I might add that when they got to the Philippines, I already mentioned that the 135 should land first. Well, the 135 couldn't make it from Hickam to the Philippines with the people, the support equipment, he ran into strong headwinds and he had to land in Guam. So this meant that we had no mobile officers or recovery officers or pogos or anything like that, at this strange field in the Philippines. So we happened to think of an old friend who had been a member of this organization, what's his name?

Major Stratton: Stanley Benekie.

Col Des Portes: Yes, Benekie. He was a staff officer in 19th Air Force in the Philippines. So I got him on the phone, told him who I was, and asked him if he remembered how to recover a U-2. He said, yes, he thought he remembered how to recover a U-2 and we reminded him that we didn't

have any pogos, and if he'd get some 50 gallon oil drums and some mattresses to keep from scratching the wings and after he got them off of the runway, he could put those under the wings to hold them up until we got some pogos there. This is the way they recovered over there, at night. But it was a real fine performance and certainly Chuck Stratton, and Hyser and Mackelmoore had the backbreaking portion of it with that

b(1)

Mr. Caywood: They certainly do. By the way, Col Des Portes, was any specific recognition given to these crewmen for this particular mission?

Col Des Portes: They were each given a DFC for it. Which is some recognition, but really doesn't tell the whole story. Unless you can relate it to the people who don't know about it.

Mr. Caywood: That's very true, Col Des Portes. Who presented the DFCs, may I ask?

Col Des Portes: I did myself. I'd like to point out in here, also, that this was b(1) which has a lot more spirit to it. They operated out of Clark Field over there in the Philippines for several days until b(1)

then they were given a standdown of several days there. There was no decision made, I guess, at higher level on what follow-on steps would be expended.

Mr. Caywood: Col Des Portes, you can't go into any more detail on Lucky Dragon at this time, is that right?

Col Des Portes: Well, I will. As far as their mission then,

b(1)

They got that. So then there seemed to be, and I don't know of which I speak here, but

b(1) A little international problem here so these people were withdrawn back to Guam and 3d Air Division. And they sat there for some several days, and then one Sunday afternoon I got a call here at Davis-Monthan and said that the CINCSAC, General Power, wanted to see me as fast as I could get up there. Well, fortunately, this Colonel from SAC Headquarters was here on the ground in a T-39 just fixing to take off, so General Bacon, my division commander, went down and commandeered him and his airplane

until I got my uniform on and I was in SAC, I was at Offutt within three hours of getting that call. General Humfeldt met me and took me over to General Power's quarters where his staff was assembled, and he briefed me on some decisions that were being made in Washington which had to do with the continued operation of this project Lucky Dragon, where it would be located and about a processing facility which would support us and what it amounted to. They were deciding whether this package would be moved into Vietnam. And General Power told me to go on home and stand by and he'd advise me on what developed. Well he did. It was about two days later in the afternoon when my new division commander reported here, General Darling, and I was showing him through my wing, and I got a call about 4:30 in the afternoon from General Power telling me

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I'll tell you about this a little bit later on, but he was right when he said that I was going to leave within the hour, because I grabbed a few old clothes and an aircraft landed there and picked me up and took me to March, I jumped out, they had the engines, at least two engines, already running on a double seat 135, and we hit the ground at Hickam about an hour to fuel and then right on into Guam. And Col McCasland was already readying his package there to be loaded on my aircraft and an additional aircraft that was coming out of Clark. We were on the ground there for about three hours getting everything loaded. Three to four hours, and then moved right on into Bien Hoa. There were a few little problems that were associated with this thing that might make it more meaningful to mention a few of them. We knew that when we hit the ground in Bien Hoa the name of the game was to add an operational capability. We always do this. We hit the ground and we immediately plan on operations, otherwise that's what they sent us for. So just prior to leaving Guam, a highly classified message came in, matter of fact I was the only one in the outfit that had the proper clearance to see such a message, so I took it and sanitized it a little bit because it was a root type message, operational mission type of estimation. We got in the back of that 135, I don't know how many people and how much equipment, but we got us about a four square foot area back in there and I got some navigators and we started planning the first mission which we were going to fly as soon as we hit the ground at b(1). Well, unfortunately, the message was garbled to the extent that some of the coordinates on there we couldn't interpretate so we,

nothing could happen then but for us to wait to get to
O(\)\ and try to get a better message. Well, we
landed at \ and a sergeant drove out in a jeep,
the facilities at \ are such that you can't taxi
a 135 down the parallel taxiways, so we just parked on
the run-up pad at the end of the runway. The sergeant
came down and wanted to know if he could help us, and I
told him that he certainly could, the best thing that
he could do would be to get some fork lifts and that
type of equipment, that we're unloading. He explained
to us that they just had one fork lift that was avail-
able but he'd see if he could get it. And in about
five or ten minutes a staff car with three officers
showed up. They wanted to know who I am and who we are
and what's my job. What business that I have there.
And I told them who I was, and told them that he should
have a message that told him about the Lucky Dragon
operation, because it was a support type message, telling
him how much quarters, how much support equipment,
parking space, fuel, all this type of business we would
need to perform our mission. Well he was completely
dumbfounded. He had received no such message and, as a
matter of fact, he said he couldn't support me. Said
he didn't have that many beds and those types of sup-
port facilities. And I told him, I said, "Well,
Colonel, I might as well just tell you right now that
if you'll tilt your head back about 45 degrees, that's

b(1) through the skies

there, and they're going to land here, and we're going
to operate from here, so whatever we can do to eke out
the situation, we'd better get started." So I found
out I had no messages there and the closest outlet for
the messages, which were classified the way our mes-
sages were, was down at the Headquarters of MACV at
Saigon. So I left my people there unloading, trying to
get set up, grabbed a Gooney Bird, a C-47, and went
down to Tan Son Nhut and caught a staff car, right over
to MACV Headquarters. Fortunately, an Army Captain in
the Army communications center over there had a message
telling who I was, what my clearance was, this kind of
business and he let me in and start reading messages.
Actually, what I was after was the root information
which would enable us to fly an operational sortie.
While I was there I found the support message which had
gone out some thirteen to fourteen hours sooner telling
them we were coming and it had just been received. So
it was pretty obvious that communications were at that
time a problem and they continued to be a problem for a
while. I got a copy of my root message there but it
was also garbled, so I had to ask SAC for a retrans-
mission. And it was that afternoon that, at that time
of the year it was exceptionally hot and humid over
there, and all this running around in a strange place

and everything, my flying suit had those salt perspiration streaks all over it and they took me to MACV Headquarters over there and introduced me to the three and four star generals. I never will forget my appreciation for General Paul Harkins, who was the commander over there then, when I apologized for my appearance he said "Well hell, you came over here to work didn't you?" From then on we got along pretty good. This deployment under the Lucky Dragon package, and I might add we flew two sorties a day for the next sixteen days. We, you might say, saturated the intelligence community which was interested in our photographic tapes. Our supply line from the states, pipeline, was a minimum of ten days and several of our critical supply orders got sidetracked for reasons unknown.

b(1)

Mr. Caywood: Col Des Portes

b(1)

Col Des Portes: And supported by a SAC 135. And while Major Stratton is here, you might ask him a little bit about the equipment itself which only a U-2 pilot can tell you because there's nobody else there with them.

Mr. Caywood: Yes. If you would, Major Stratton, just give us your own personal account.

Major Stratton: Okay. In anything like this that comes up in a hurry, there's always a few funny moments. The first one, I was on leave in the area when I received, I had been down to have a muffler put on my car and I got back home about 4:00 in the afternoon, my wife said "You had a phone call from the Command Post." And I called the Command Post and Major Hill, the officer in charge of the Command Post, and he said "You aren't going to Barksdale." I had been scheduled for a TDY to Barksdale leaving in about four days. I had just that afternoon taken all my clothes to the cleaners to get ready for this trip to Barksdale, and he said "You aren't going to Barksdale." He said "you're going on another deployment and I can't tell you where, but go to bed and start your crew rest and we'll call you sometime after midnight." And I said, "Well, cold, hot, where am I going?" He said, "Well pack clothes for an indefinite stay in warm climate." And I figured that was good enough. So I went back to the cleaners, got all my dirty clothes rolled up in a ball, jammed them

in a B-4 bag, packed a few other things, and went to bed. Exactly midnight the phone rang. Well that's the way it started for me. We came out here and had a briefing in the squadron's operations room. We got on the 135 as Col Des Portes said, on some mattresses they had laid on the floor and took two sleeping pills. I did. And I recall them starting number three engine on the 135, that's the last thing I remember until we put down at Hickam.

Col Des Portes: There's one other little thing. You know

b(1)

The extent, instead of calling it we called it sick-80. That's what some of the pilots called it. So in the briefing that morning, Hyser had, what'd he have a b(1) Mackelmoore had b(1), and Stratton had sick-80, so when they called out the pilot's names and told them their assigned aircraft, well Hyser and Mackelmoore began to chuckle. Stratton was chagrined.

Major Stratton: As it worked out, I had the best aircraft of the three of them. I had the last laugh on that. Anyway, when we got on the ground at Hickam, and on the 135 between Davis-Monthan here and Hickam, the navigators had completely planned the next route, that long leg from Hickam to Clark for a two hour ground time. Well, we were on the ground a little longer due to a fuel problem and one or two other things, but anyway when we left there we didn't have any celestial information to use. Our route from Hickam to Clark was DR7. And I might add that it worked out perfectly. Couldn't have been any better on our navigation. Out of Hickam, we all got airborne after sitting on the ground in a pressure suit for about 45 minutes to a hour in the boiling sun, it was a good feeling to get airborne, to get cooled off. But anyway, the next humorous incident was immediately after refueling. I'm sure that the Command Post and all of the, well Col Des Portes and all of his staff back here were anxiously awaiting the results of our refueling at Wake Island. And they knew approximately when we were supposed to be there, of course. Just after I had finished getting fuel and start on my way, I leveled off to get an altitude, the single sideband radio came to life with a call from the Command Post here at Davis-Monthan. They were calling whatever they called the airplane that Major Hyser was in. And he either had it turned down too low or he couldn't hear from some reason, and I heard it, and answered. Major Hill said "What was the result of Muscle Magic?" And I said, "Muscle Magic 100 percent." You could almost hear the sigh in the Command Post. That's our way of saying it was successful. And then

when we got to Hickam, or correction, Clark, the 135 was there just behind us. Well, we were all ready to land by that time, the b(1) I know I was ready to land. And I know that Major Hyser and Major Mackelmoore was ready to land also. They had, Major Hyser landed, Major Mackelmoore landed. As I was on what you might say initial approach for the runway in one direction, this KC-135 was coming in the other direction to land. Well I saw some lights down there on the field that looked like it might be a tower, so I called the tower and told them they'd better have that 135 go around, it looked like there was somebody on the runway. So they did. They broke him out and I landed. After I landed the 135 landed with all support people. We got on the ground and they held the wings up until we taxied in. Colonel Beneke was there to meet the aircraft and they walked the wings off the runway into the parking area that they had rigged for us and I shut down and got out of there.

Mr. Caywood: This was almost like getting a parking space in a supermarket, wasn't it Major Stratton?

Major Stratton: We didn't have any particular problems at all on the flight. None. The refueling went very smooth, it was a good deployment really.

Mr. Caywood: How was your physical endurance, Major Stratton, did you feel extreme fatigue on the long leg?

Major Stratton: No. It wasn't until about the last ten or fifteen minutes I began to realize I was tired. I think when it got dark, I'm assuming that. It's boring sitting there to watch the waves go by, but I felt pretty good really as far as there was no problem trying to stay awake or anything like this until the last ten to fifteen minutes. Just before getting into the final pattern to land, and then I could really feel it, and when I got on the ground, got out of the airplane, I think I slept for fourteen hours.

Mr. Caywood: Would you feel that that was probably similar to the reaction of Major Hyser and . . .

Major Stratton: Yes. Very definitely.

Col Des Portes: I think there's no question that they were all extremely tired at the termination. I believe you told me when I had a chance to talk to you over at b(1) that you were glad that you had the experience, but if you'd had your druthers, you'd just as soon have let that one go.

Mr. Caywood: One time was enough. I'm sure it was appreciated, Major Stratton. It was interesting. Do you remember these things in detail, this was in February of last year, right?

Major Stratton: That's when we left here. That is correct. In February of last year. By the way, I think that there may be one point of interest here in regard to the personal equipment, the partial pressure suit that we wear now compared to what we originally started the program with in 1956

b(1)

The washout rate for those that couldn't complete the training was quite high. A personal experience of mine was that on the day that I went to Wright-Patterson to make my suit run, seven of us went there and I was the only one to complete that day due to, three of the men couldn't complete the run lasting more than about five or ten minutes, and one man passed out completely in the chamber and two didn't even get into the chamber because the suit didn't fit to suit the specialists at the aero-med lab there. Now, with the advances that have been made in the partial pressure suits, our current MC-3 that we are wearing, having full torso bladder and down the thighs, prevents almost anyone from washing out of the partial pressure suit training. There's been a great advance made in the personal equipment department pressure suit.

Mr. Caywood: Did, is this new type really comfortable, do you think?

Major Stratton: No, no I won't say it's comfortable. It's a little bit more comfortable than the other one, in that it doesn't have to fit as tight because it has more bladders, but you can't by any stretch of the imagination say it's comfortable. It's more comfortable than the old MC-1, it doesn't have to fit quite so tight.

Mr. Caywood: It presents no problem as far as a pilot being disqualified?

Major Stratton: No. I'm sure that they do lose some, now, even in this suit. But I'm sure it isn't nearly what it was.

Col Des Portes: This cuff that he's talking about in this suit, is, I've talked to the likes of Major Stratton, many times. The suit is just as discomforting now as it was when we first started. They just accept this. You've got a rubber neck seal, it has to fit tightly to protect you,

it's necessary that it fits tight. To me it's just like I wear a 17 shirt and somebody gives me a 15 shirt and wear it the same number of hours. You feel like somebody's got you by the neck and choked most of the time.

Major Stratton: I feel that one of the most classic questions that I ever heard asked in my life is by one of the physiological specialists that helped to suit you up. They get you in the suit and snap it all up with the neck seal the colonel mentioned, and put you on the console to inflate the suit to check it, and as he pushes the button and blows you up under high pressure, and you're sitting there all squeezed in, he always asks you "How does that feel?" I've never yet figured out what he expects as an answer.

(NOTE: Tape number 3 begins in the middle of a conversation, speaker is unidentified.)

You gotta keep in there pushing and shoving and that's just what we're gonna do. But the cornerstone we built this on is your performance. We're not talking about conversation, we're not talking about pharmacists. Everyday SAC if laying it on the line in a hundred different ways. Proof of the efficiency and effectiveness as measured by standards against other performance. Take the U-2 operation. This is one I'm particularly proud of. There are people here from the U-2, are they in on the group now? Are they? Well, let me tell you something, is Des Portes here? [Yes] Well, it's a great operation. A lot of you people don't know it because there's a lot of secrecy in it and not bally-hoos

b(1)

Now we look at the amount of flying hours that they put in, it's real dangerous flying too, and their operation, on a dollar cost per flying hour, is fantastic. They don't have thousands of people down there. They do their job and they've been doing it day in and day out. They're never in trouble, I never get U-2 people kicking somebody in the ass, somebody getting drunk in a bar, raping some woman, and they been in all kinds of places, with the spot light on them and a lot of people curious about them. This is a group of men who have done a fantastic job, as mature men and a model of efficiency. And don't think this is going unnoticed. They're doing one hell of a job

b(1)



that, under the damnedest conditions, I'm glad to say we finally got you those trailers over there. These people have done a fantastic job and let me tell you, I just got word the other day, General Power was out there with Mr. MacNamara and I got this second hand from him, but he was telling somebody pretty high up about that SAC operation and his adjectives were fantastic, out of this world, the greatest thing he's ever seen in his life, and that's exactly what it is. But day in and day out, under real rough conditions and they moved in there fast, in an amount of hours, and started operating under real rough conditions. And there hasn't been any well, we can't do it or this or that, all they want is to be turned loose and they're producing it. And it's a great tribute to your organization, Des Portes, and I've told you that before, but I want all these people to hear it, you've got a great group of men. There's never been one little bellyache, complaint out of these pilots, and they stick their neck out plenty. This is a lonely god damn flight over some of the damnedest territory, some of it friendly, some of it hostile. Here's a group of men who day in and day out have done one hell of a job. Now that's what kind of men you've got in SAC. Now I just can't see, to wrap this thing up, how with this fantastic performance, how anybody . . .

Col Des Portes: Well actually, Mr. Caywood, we put in that very privileged piece of film there, remarks of General Power, prior to a commanders conference, during the course of a commanders conference up at SAC. They let me have it, I've treated it as very privileged information but I played it for the benefit of my crews and some of the supervisors here in the wing who've shared a lot of the load on some of these operations. They certainly appreciate it, his comments, and I couldn't come back from the conference and quote him, couldn't speak as forcefully as he did in the first place, and besides there's nothing like hearing it right from the big boss' own words.

Mr. Caywood: I agree.

Col Des Portes: But I would like to say that picking up from some of our previous conversations here, the Lucky Dragon project, that

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But I've mentioned previously we went the first sixteen days two sorties a day and then we slowed down a little at SAC's instruction and started waiting on better weather in certain

areas, but the operation has continued from that time period right on up to now and it's still going in great shape.

Mr. Caywood: What is the tempo of your sorties now, Col Des Portes?

Col Des Portes: Well, we fly, we're running around seven or eight a week. It's a function of not only operational requirement or intelligence requirement, but it's also a function of weather. When the weather is good, we'll go seven or eight sorties a week. We have two aircraft over there at the present time. General Power mentioned in his remarks that he'd been over in that part of the country in Australia and he came on up to the Far East. And he wanted to come visit us there in Bien Hoa. But for reasons that I'm not too familiar with, he didn't come into Saigon and instead he went into Bangkok. So he wired me to meet him in Bangkok and discuss my operation with him. So on the 25th of March of 1964, I flew over to Bangkok in the early morning with a briefing, took one of my officers, Captain Ray Pearson with me, he built a top secret briefing, and I met him at the airport in Bangkok and he indicated to me that he'd like for me to brief him downtown since he was involved with the public officials of Thailand out there at the airport, so it wasn't a suitable place to take it. So I briefed General Power and his staff in downtown Saigon where he was staying. In the course of the briefing, I also had taken some pictures of the facilities where we performed our maintenance, what we lived in, and not in order to complain to him, but in order to try to give him an actual factual type of accounting of the conditions under which we operated over there. He turned to General Wilson, who was still the Director of Materiel at SAC, and said "Why can't we get those boys some trailers for the crews to sleep in?" Well, action started immediately and during the middle of April, trailers were flown from SAC bases in, which had previously been used for alert crews at certain SAC bases, they were real fine air-conditioned, large house trailers were flown over and we set them up in a complex over there which was separate and aside from the rest of the facility. Now, it's not easy to get real estate over there. As a matter of fact, you have to go to the VNAV Air Force commander, the base commander, to even get a piece of real estate large enough to set a generator on or something like that. But we got our trailers set up, got our crews moved into them, and it certainly made living for them one hundred percent better. Now when we first moved in there I commandeered a couple of trailers rather small, that had been used by the tactical crews who were previously pulling a leg over there. These trailers were

very small, but it did give the men a place, an air-conditioned place to sleep. And this was of prime importance because the humidity, the temperature, and the mosquitoes and the rats were so bad over there that sleeping was a considerable problem. You had to wait in those huts until about eleven o'clock at night for it to get cool enough for you to sleep and then when you got through spraying the bed with that mosquito repellent and putting your mosquito netting and everything up, it was sort of miserable sleeping. In the early morning it would get hot so soon you had to get up, but I wanted to point out that these trailers have probably saved some of our people. Had we not gotten these trailers, and continued to house our U-2 crews in the small trailers which are located down on the flightline, adjacent to, between the control tower and what is known as the hot pad where the armed aircraft are parked, I believe we might have incurred a little disaster on Halloween night when the Viet Cong slipped up on the field with mortars and not only burned up a bunch of airplanes but they killed a bunch of people and wounded a bunch of people. And those trailers which were first utilized by my U-2 crews between the tower and the hot pad were riddled with mortar fire, so General Power probably didn't realize at the time, although he was trying to look out for the welfare of his people, and to give them a decent place to rest, he probably saved their lives as well.

Mr. Caywood: I can see that.

Col Des Portes: And then, we've been fortunate on two occasions over there. As you know, during the week past, which they're investigating now, they had the misfortune of the ordnance of the B-57 going off and a chain reaction where they lost lots more aircraft, lots more lives, lots more wounded. And the 4080th has been exceptionally fortunate in that they've had no personnel injuries, and only in the last episode was there any damage to equipment and it was of a minor nature. One U-2 picked up a couple of frag holes, one in the tail and one in the wing which they fixed in about a six hour period after they could get to the aircraft. Yesterday I processed a recommendation for the Airman's Medal for Captain Balkneck, who is in my DC-130 program. He was co-pilot on a crew over there and right in the middle of these B-57 explosions, bomb explosions, petroletum fires, he moved right into the center of it, by himself, got into the DC-130, started it up and taxied it to safety. And this is a most heroic deed on his part and I feel sure that we would have lost the DC-130 had it not been for his actions.

Mr. Caywood: So your losses have been of this only very minor nature, in this most recent incident then?

Col Des Portes: That's right. And there's no loss there actually because the DC-130 picked up a couple of fragment holes in the wing which we fixed and the one U-2 that I spoke of. So all they had to do was to clear the runway, and we were back in operation.

Mr. Caywood: Yes, I understand that. In regard, Col Des Portes, to the trailers that were brought over at General Power's initiation, what is the capacity, do you have one crewman per trailer, or what are these?

Col Des Portes: No, these are rather large trailers and you use, we can sleep about four crewmembers in a trailer. Now, we've configured them differently as the requirements have changed from time to time, but we also do our flight planning and our debriefing and briefing and these types of functions in these trailers. I have one smaller than the others in which we have the flight surgeon housed. He keeps the pilots' pressure suits and their other psychological equipment in there and has his sick calls as well as living in there. On occasion we become crowded and double up a little bit. As an example, my last tour over there of some five weeks, I lived with the flight suits, surgeon and slept on what would be called a lounge in the room where he maintains his personnel equipment.

Mr. Caywood: Right. Col Des Portes, would you comment at this time on the necessity for painting the U-2s black, and the details connected with that project?

Col Des Portes: Yes sir. There's a little story behind the coloring of the U-2s. If you want to call it that. When I first took the wing and since the inception of the U-2 program, we'd left them in their original state. We kept them polished, and the silver aluminum that they're made out of is really a thing of beauty, because my maintenance people took great pride in keeping them glistening. We had some operations that were conducted in tropics and ocean areas where we picked up salt spray on some of our aircraft. This was, well we got them contaminated in Guam, Okinawa, during the weapons testing in the Pacific, Panama, Puerto Rico, these types of places. Over a period of time, corrosion from salt water began to show up on our aircraft. So we knew we had to give up our old silver birds and put some paint on them. It's an interesting story here. We had our meeting of our little weapons systems group as we called it,

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b(1)

We could either paint them a dark, almost a navy blue color, some paint that was on hand, or we could paint them grey. Well I said I wanted them grey. I had a very definite reason for wanting grey. I believe that the aircraft maintenance business, if you've got a clean light colored aircraft you can keep it that way and determine leaks, this kind of business better than you can on a dark colored airplane. And that was my reason for asking for the grey color. Somebody asked me why I wanted them grey. I jokingly said because I'm a southerner and I have great respect for old John Mosby, the grey ghost, and I'd just as soon go along with that color. Well, this thing was taken out of context and quoted up at the Washington level and some character up there said they had a colonel down there that wants his U-2s painted grey just because he was a southerner. But actually, it was my only consideration of the choice of the two colors, was I felt, we could keep a cleaner aircraft. Now we went along alright with these grey aircraft, all through the Cuban situation and other operations, until we ran into the prospects of intercepts from the enemy fighters that existed b(1) out primarily the threat that existed in Vietnam, and we also investigated a possible change in our tactics which has to do with the b(1) a pattern of flying and changing course over a certain period of time and to keep them from, well to keep us from being like sitting ducks. We were, we could at least confuse them. We ran some tests that SAC planned to test and had us run, in conjunction with the Air Defense Command, under a controlled GCI environment and also under an airborne intercept type environment. And the F-104 and F-106 pilots, I believe it was, reported that during these tests which were conducted down in the area of Eglin, that we had one aircraft painted black and one which was painted grey. And as far as visual acquisition, these two aircraft, he said he had the most difficulty visually acquiring the black aircraft but that the grey aircraft stood out like a sore thumb. So in the interest of safety and consideration of the missions that our people were flying, it was decided to immediately paint them all black color. And I'm very happy that they ran those tests, and I feel that our people have a better chance with them black and as well as with the new tactics that were developed out of this test.

Mr. Caywood:

Yes. Did you, Col Des Portes, have any particular single incident in which you had to have your operating aircraft in regard to b(1) repainted rather quickly?

Col Des Portes: Oh yes. You see, we had aircraft in position over at OL 20 which is Bien Hoa there in Vietnam, and we had the aircraft at Barksdale which was involved in the Cuban situation. So we could handle the painting of all those in the Zone of Interior relative quickly, the ones that were over at OL 20, there are no maintenance facilities over there where you can paint an aircraft. So we flew them into Andersen at Guam and flew a team of painters from the state with the paint out there and painted them very quickly and returned the aircraft back to South Vietnam.

Mr. Caywood: With no delay in operating mission?

Col Des Portes: No, no we did them one at a time and it didn't cost us anything to speak of.

Mr. Caywood: Col Des Portes, I know that you moved from Laughlin to Davis-Monthan where you are now operating. Did you have any particular operating problems as a result of this move?

Col Des Portes: The answer is no. I'm not saying that we didn't have to work harder and extend a little bit of extra effort, but I'm real proud of that move from Laughlin to Davis-Monthan because we maintained our emergency war order capability, we maintained our operational location posture, and we never degraded our training or anything else. We moved in here, and I also want to add that there was not a single incident like an automobile accident or injury or anything associated with that move. And I attribute it to sound planning on the part of my people and a relatively good state of discipline that was maintained during the move. Now, at the same time we moved to Davis-Monthan, we had been operating the Cuban effort out of Laughlin. The range from Davis-Monthan to Cuba would have caused us to have to stage or either post-strike at another base and then set up a sort of a leap frog type operation. To avoid this, we moved that operating location up to Barksdale at the same time we moved here.

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Mr. Caywood: Yes sir. Col Des Portes, was there a particular reason for you to move your headquarters or your wing from Laughlin to Davis-Monthan? Was there operational considerations here?

Col Des Portes: Well, I don't believe that operational considerations had anything to do with the move. Many of these unit moves, base closures, and those types of things, as you well know, have political overtures that I'm not at liberty to discuss, but when I went to Laughlin in the summer of '61, it was programmed to close the following

year, end of that fiscal year. And it was also planned to move the 4080th to Davis-Monthan at that time. About three months after I got there it was announced that not only would Laughlin not close, but that they would move in an air training command mission to better utilize the base. It was better utilized alright. We were sort of packed in there like sardines with the dual mission. And the 4080th movement date was delayed by one year, making it the summer of '63 instead of the summer of '62. As far as operational considerations were concerned, the ideal location for the 4080th Wing would be in the more or less center of the country because of our training, our photographic legs around the ZI, it would probably be operationally better in the center of the country, but once again this gets into the program of where we're going to have bases and where are the units going to be located and the only disadvantage you might say of coming to Davis-Monthan is the fact that we have a single runway.

b(1)

And since we've been here two years, we've lost many, many sorties due to this wind factor. Whereas at Laughlin, we had a cross runway that we could recover on and it gave us a lot more flexibility in our scheduling. But other than that, we've been able to perform our mission in either place, so I don't think it's appropriate to point out the advantages and disadvantages of either as long as we can get our mission accomplished.

Mr. Caywood: No critical problem then, in moving from one place, from Laughlin to Davis-Monthan?

Col Des Portes: No sir.

Mr. Caywood: Col Des Portes, in regard to the U-2 locations, it's well known that you operate many of your significant missions from overseas locations. Would you care to discuss any particular problems you may have had in locating U-2 detachments in the overseas areas?

Col Des Portes: Well, I've already touched on the fact that we moved out of the Philippines crying. Certainly Clark Field is a much nicer place to operate from than Bien Hoa. But that in itself was decided at the top level and I'm not familiar with all of the details, we just go where we're told. But

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And I believe that the most recent experience, other than what I've covered, was the establishment of an operating location in the United Kingdom in 1962. And since that was the busiest part of our recent history, the Cuban situation was going, the Russians were testing weapons, and we were deployed all over the universe. Let's call Art Leatherwood, the Assistant Deputy Commander for Operations, to discuss going into the United Kingdom. He was the operating location commander, he deployed that package, operated over there and then brought it home. So Art, how about you talking about the, such things as the reaction of the British public to American U-2s on their soil. I've seen some pretty interesting cartoons you brought back from the British newspapers, but you can tell it better than I.

LTC Leatherwood Well, there was some very definite reactions. We went in August in 1962 to stay for ninety days to operate an air sampling during periods that the Soviets were testing up north of Norway and Denmark. The night we were leaving, as a matter of fact, we were on the 135 ready to leave, when our IXO came aboard and told me that the public release had been made in the British newspapers that day that we were coming into the UK with the U-2. The fact that we were going had been held up, I think approximately a week from the time that we were first alerted, pending the Prime Minister's approval to bring the U-2 in. Of course they were, the British were quite reluctant to anything at that time which might stir up the Soviets. However, since it was a sampling operation, the Prime Minister did finally agree and we were on our way. And as I said, the British public was informed the day before we arrived that we were coming. When we did arrive, about noon, into Upper Heyford, which is just to the north of Oxford, an American station, that is a British station but American manned B-47 reflex base, we were met by the commanding general of the 7th Air Division, and his IXO, the base command, and created quite a stir, the arrival itself. As soon as I was clear from landing the aircraft, I was told that we would have, that they had convened a press conference to the extent of telling the commanding general of the 7th Air Division that he should delay his greeting me or briefing until after this press conference was over. So they snatched me immediately away as soon as I cleared customs and took me up to the officer's club to have this news conference which lasted about 45 minutes. There were some 35 or 40 of the British press, I shouldn't say press, British news media there including the press, all the major newspapers, all the major radio networks, and the two television networks were all there. They had some rather pointed questions, however, based upon the

information that I gave them that

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They asked me some pointed questions about other things relating to Gary Powers' incident and I was there to tell them that we were there simply for air sampling, they were satisfied. And all of the major papers and headlines in that night's edition and both the networks had filmed the interview or had special interviews after the major conference, and for a period of approximately two weeks there was not a single edition of the paper, of any paper that I saw, that didn't have some reference to the fact that the U-2s were operating. It started out as a two-inch banner headline and as time went by, it moved to second, third, and fourth pages and got smaller in size. I also got some personal fan mail from various people. Some of them were direct threats, what were those imperialist spies doing in the UK in spy planes and this sort of thing.

Mr. Caywood: Were these letters signed, colonel?

LTC Leatherwood Some of them were signed, some of them were not. All this type of correspondence was turned over to the OSI and through OSI into the British intelligence channels, and I guess they have the same type of thing we do, any kind of threatening correspondence like this, compared with known people and subversives, and they eventually gave them all back to me, but they were all checked out. There were some mass meetings in various places in England and I think the most outspoken, of course, was Bertrand Russell and his ban the bomb crowds. He had some particular remarks to make about the U-2 flying in England. There were some demonstrations in the vicinity of the base. There was a particular holiday, I've forgotten what it was, in which we were informed that there would be a ban the bomb demonstration at Upper Heyford particularly aimed at the protesting the U-2's presence. It unfortunately, or rather I should say fortunately for us, it was not much of a demonstration because that particular base is an open base, it has a major highway, the Queen's Highway, goes straight through the middle of the base. The only place where people are denied access is the flightline itself, and this some two or three blocks away from the highway and away from the main base. So any kind of demonstration that did develop was out of sight and received no attention.

Mr. Caywood: What, in your estimation colonel, was the editorial reaction? Was it generally favorable, generally unfavorable, or what percentage would you say in regard to the U-2 operation?

LTC Leatherwood I think generally it was favorable. Maybe in a 60-40 proportion. I think one of the major reasons that it fell this way was the British are very jealous of their parliamentary procedure and the people's right to know what is going on and this particular thing happened at a time when the parliament was not in session. And there was, what do they call it, protest from the front pew, or from the front row of the parliament when it did convene while we were still in England and not protesting the fact that the U-2 was there, but protesting the fact that it was brought in at a time when parliament was not in session and the Prime Minister took it upon himself to allow the U-2 in the UK without parliament's consent.

Mr. Caywood: The critics of, that applies to this particular comment, that you think probably were opponents of the Prime Minister then?

LTC Leatherwood I think it was political, yes.

Col Des Portes: Members of the opposition.

LTC Leatherwood Members of the opposition. There was another rather humorous item in the papers, came out within a few days after we arrived, Came out with a half-page cartoon in the newspaper showing some rather gruesome, sinister characters walking down the flightline with pressure suits and blankets wrapped over them and completely draped in cameras of all kinds, with the little character that Giles gets in all his, saying "If you've only come to check the weather, I hope you've brought your suicide pills." In other words, there was a great deal of undercurrent of "Yeah, you're just here to check the weather, but we know better, you're really spy planes." And, of course, every article always starts out with the Gary Powers spy plane or the U-2 spy plane. And this was what our major opposition was centered around, was the fact that we were just simply using the weather as a cover up for something else.

Mr. Caywood: Would you say the responsible press, and of course taking the influential London Times, was this generally favorable?

LTC Leatherwood Yes, the press itself, as you so aptly phrased it, the responsible press, treated us very well. I might say that the British press, in their conference, and I've had, I've been interviewed by the American press, are a much nicer and a much more reserved group of people. Their press releases showed the same thing.

Mr. Caywood: I see. Now in regard to the demonstrations about the U-2 operations, would that have been involving more than 200 people at any one location?

LTC Leatherwood Well, I really don't know how many people were involved. There was a meeting, I've forgotten now the name of the organization, but it was held in a small town just off the base of Upper Heyford and they submitted a petition to the parliament which had something like, I believe, I'm guessing, I'm going back trying to refresh, but something like fifteen hundred or two thousand signatures. But this was not a demonstration as such, but it was a petition that was circulated by this particular organization.

Mr. Caywood: Yes, and would you say that after a period of about two weeks that opposition, even comment, had almost diminished to nothing?

LTC Leatherwood Generally. There would occasionally be another little flare up or another meeting or something of this type that would make the papers, but at the end of the first month or six weeks, we were accepted and . . .

Mr. Caywood: And about how long, colonel, by the way, did these particular, this particular aspect of the U-2 mission, U-2 operations last?

LTC Leatherwood We were there for 90 days.

Mr. Caywood: 90 days. In regard to this particular aspect, Col Des Portes, Colonel Leatherwood here has mentioned the reaction of the foreign press to the Gary Powers affair. Would you say that this publicity in regard to the Gary Powers affair, although it was connected to NASA, did it affect your organization's operations to any degree?

Col Des Portes: Well directly, not at all. The 4080th was already well established in the business when this occurred and it brought more things out into the open about the U-2, and of course, because the press was full of the U-2 incident, the Gary Powers incident, there's some little minor side issues that evolved from it. As an example, Gary Powers is employed as a test pilot in the U-2 branch of Kelly Johnson's Lockheed Skunk Works out there, and as a test pilot he came down on a meeting that we had here where Lockheed representatives attended to work out a schedule for modifying some of the airplanes. And he has ferried every airplane in here a time or two. Well, the night before the meeting he checked into a downtown hotel and I feel very sorry for Gary Powers because he cannot lead a normal life in this country. He signed in the hotel as Francis Gary Powers and the hotel clerk obviously turned his name over to the local press here, so when he unlocked his door the next morning to go get breakfast, they descended upon him. And so he couldn't, told him if anything came up to get ahold of me, but he didn't have

an opportunity to get ahold of me. So he very cleverly told them that he would be down in the lobby in about five or ten minutes and he'd talk to them down there. Well they left him and when they did, he went down the fire escape out the back of the hotel and came on out here. And we arranged to have him sent back where he wouldn't encounter the press. But some of my people in the wing here knew Gary Powers when he was a lieutenant in the Air Force, consider him a friend of theirs, and of course, I always get asked every since I've been in the 4080th Wing, particularly when I get around newspaper people, writers, do you know Gary Powers? Well, fortunately for the first two years that I had the wing I could say "No, I've never seen Gary Powers." But then after he started coming to these conferences that year, I couldn't answer that I'd never seen him, but I always assure them that Gary Powers had never been in the 4080th Wing. It's well known that he was not.

Mr. Caywood: He does serve as a useful person, however, insofar as consultation is concerned with the 4080th from time to time?

Col Des Portes: Oh yes, he's well qualified in the U-2 program, and he's employed by Lockheed. He flight tests the aircraft that goes through Iran out there and he's just like any other member of the company as far as I'm concerned except he has the whatever you call it, I guess great misfortune of that type of publicity.

Mr. Caywood: He's become famous. Col Des Portes, could you comment on some of the early problems in establishing the Lucky Dragon and Trojan Horse operations in Bien Hoa, such as communications?

Col Des Portes: Yes sir, I've already discussed a good bit about the relatively primitive facilities that we had over there. And still have I might add. Except for the trailers which SAC very graciously provided us for the crews and the flight planning, and what not, for the crews to live in and for other functions to take place in. Now, I mentioned logistics a little earlier. I said there was a minimum of a ten day pipeline out there on parts and replenishment. I should tell you a little bit about the logistics function of the wing because it's peculiar than any other Air Force activity that I know of.

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But we talked about cost effectiveness on the whole Dragon Lady program, this is another example of that cost effectiveness. We get prompt delivery. I have my own separate supply setup within this wing with

its own communications with Warner Robins and

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b(1) They program for replenishment of spares and this kind of business and I assure you that, based on what I've observed in the last four years, there's no fat in the program. They do an excellent job of programming what is needed with a minimum of overstocking. And they knew what my problem was, what I needed when I got to Bien Hoa, what airlift was at a premium, the routing was subject to change and I'll be very frank about it, we had some pretty critical times there on getting needed items in time to maintain, to keep the operation going. And I'd also like to give credit to some of the maintenance and supply people in the 4080th Wing. There's a world of ingenuity amongst these people and they have come up with substitute solutions for critical problems many times which enabled us to keep going when the supplies weren't to be had.

Mr. Caywood: Col Des Portes, would you say that some of your problems here in regard to reaching almost critical stages insofar as supplying your operations in Bien Hoa from Warner Robins, could this have been attributed to a lack of understanding of the priority of your mission or something to do with communications?

Col Des Portes: No, there's nothing about the priority of the mission. That was well known, but you have to realize that, well I'll take it as an example, film -- this film that we use is It represents the latest state of the art. It's very expensive

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Mr. Caywood: Could you mention those companies?

Col Des Portes:

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But this stuff is not in abundant, unlimited supply. And we moved out, we took what we had on hand and immediately back ordered for replenishment of what we took. Well, I'm informed that this causes Eastman Kodak and people like that to have to set up a special production, an accelerated production to meet these demands. Well I told you about how much we were flying over there. We were expending one dickens of a lot of this film. That was our most critical item. One single item. But there were other items. Say you needed a part for an aircraft, a critical item, one that was grounded. Well, by the time we discovered that that part had failed and we needed a replacement, it would take a minimum of ten days to get it. That's the point I'm making. And there was no faster means available. The people functioned fast to give us top

priority support, but by the time you got it to the west coast, and either through the southern route or the northern route, and into the various military MATS terminals that handled it and what not, it just took that long.

Mr. Caywood: A specialized need, actually, caused ten days to be actually pretty good operating procedures?

Col Des Portes: Yes, yes. And on the subject of communications, we had a long hard road to pull over there. I mentioned previously that I was the only one with certain types of clearances that could receive certain types of communications and this facility terminated in downtown Saigon. So I would have, I was not allowed to travel by road because of my clearance status and the Viet Cong threat between Bien Hoa and Saigon, so I had to travel by administrative aircraft. There were times when I didn't have administrative aircraft and I had to fly in whatever was available, in these little U-10s and L-1 spotter planes and things like that. I flew in whatever was available to transport me. And for the first week or ten days, I'd meet myself coming. I'd go down and get messages that we needed out at Bien Hoa four hours ago for flight planning, get them sanitized, and grab an airplane and get back to Bien Hoa, give the messages to the people who had to have the contents for mission planning, and when I'd arrive at Bien Hoa, I'd be informed that the people down at MACV in Saigon had a change to the message I was just bringing or one that superseded it, or one that had a definite overriding impact on it so I'd turn around and go back. This happened day and night for about ten days there. At night when the weather was bad, we had to get messages, I had to travel by ground. We had to operate, so what I would do is get a vehicle and detail me a man with one of those AR-15 rifles, and put him in the front seat with the driver and I'd get me some, a reliable piece of firearm and get in the back seat and we'd communicate in that fashion. We did things that we probably should not have done under ordinary circumstances but we had to get on with the program.

Mr. Caywood: You had to actually operate because this was actual combat?

Col Des Portes: That's right. And on the subject of logistics in general, I want to also tell you something about the 4080th. I don't have statistics available while I'm talking here about how many people, how many tons of equipment, and how many miles that the 4080th has been involved in moving, and it's a real tribute to some people that I've got in my logistics section down here

that have been with me for several years. I have two officers and three airmen down there and they have really done a yeoman's job.

Mr. Caywood: Well, Col Des Portes, you have it in your written history, and other documented data, we can get details on this type of thing, this contribution.

Col Des Portes: Yes.

Mr. Caywood: Another question here, Col Des Portes, in regard to b(1) I've been interested if you and other members of your staff, pilots, support personnel, if you have to live within certain restrictions that are special and in addition to that of other Air Force personnel? Are your own personal activities restricted to where you have to keep in contact with higher headquarters and does your own staff have to stay within a certain radius for travel restrictions?

Col Des Portes: Well, I won't say that my movements are any more restricted than a normal SAC wing commander. And I won't say that my staff is any more restricted than a normal SAC wing staff. I will say that our frequency of contact with higher headquarters greatly exceeds that of, I'm sure of that of a bombardment wing, let's say, because at somewhere in the world the sun is shining 24 hours a day. And it normally means that there's a U-2 or a 4080th operation going at some part of the world at some 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And any problems that arise with these operations, of course, involves me and my staff and we're in frequent contact with higher headquarters without regard to normal work day or five days a week type of operation. It's a continuous thing.

Mr. Caywood: Yes. Well, Col Des Portes, you, or a responsible member of your staff, could be on call at any time? In other words, you could be reached within . . .

Col Des Portes: Oh, yes. Myself or my vice commander is on the phone subject to immediate response to the phone any time day and night. And I also have what I consider my battle staff and they operate under the same assumption. They don't have to be as immediately available, but their location has to be exactly known. In other words, I might call one of my staff and he might be at the local grocery store or something like that, but his wife answers the phone, knows he'll be back in fifteen minutes, things like that.

Mr. Caywood: Yes. Also Col Des Portes, would you comment on any particular security precautions that you have had to take, or your OL has had to take, in regard to Dragon Lady and Trojan Horse operations in Bien Hoa?

Col Des Portes: Well, you mean in place security precautions?

Mr. Caywood: Yes sir.

Col Des Portes: Yes, as a result of, well I'll start when we first arrived. I personally briefed every man I had about the threat that he was exposed to over there. As you well know, that's one of the major problems in that campaign over there is that a Viet Cong and an anti-Communist Vietnamese look exactly alike, you can't tell, and in many cases they might be brothers but of different political beliefs. And that's what makes the difference in the two issues over there. So, if you go out and expose yourself, your safety is a direct result of the amount of exposure. And I told them to stay out of certain areas, certain places. I did not allow them to travel at night, I didn't impose a curfew as such, but I just told them that after nine o'clock I didn't want anybody outside of a certain area. Because you can never tell, these little bars, these little shopping areas, this kind of thing, the threat is constant. All it takes is one Viet Cong with a home-made Molotov cocktail or a hand grenade or something else where he could, and as you well know by reading the papers that this happens frequently, so it's a rather confining existence with the people because we don't give them free range to travel around and to expose themselves. Now, as far as the installation over there is concerned, after that Halloween night fiasco, there's been one hell of a lot of bags filled with sand, and precautions of this nature taken, and specific plans written on what each individual does in the case of attack of that nature. And it's been practiced and exercised and also what part they might play in an attack has also been spelled out. This is an overall base coordinated plan. It not only involved my people but it involves the many segments of the people who are on that station.

Mr. Caywood: Would you say, Col Des Portes, that you have had to give additional training to U-2 pilots and support personnel in regard to say such things as judo training or self-protection from the physical point of view?

Col Des Portes: No. We haven't gone that deep but one of the first things we did when we got over here last spring had to do with firearms. The base over there had a supply of the new AR-15 rifles which is a real effective weapon. So I took my U-2 pilots and support people and everybody else and sent them to the rifle range to become proficient in that weapon so that they armed themselves with something better than a snub-nosed .38 revolver. And I might add that I had a couple of U-2 crews, one in particular, that couldn't believe what he was told.

Cause when the sun went down, he'd come to the little ole command post that we had and get his AR-15, and he slept with that thing and when the sun came up he'd come back up and turn it in. But I wasn't going out at night and try to wake him up because . . .

LTC Leatherwood Another interesting thing about the weapons and rifle range was that the range was shared with the Viet Cong. It was not secure and in order to use the range it was necessary to get the b(1) to get a bunch of their troops and go down and clear and secure the range so that you could use it. Because there had been occasion that people had been fired upon at the range by the Viet Cong.

Col Des Portes: Well, it even goes further than that Art, because when we were there last spring, we had a schedule something like Monday, Wednesday and Friday that we could use the range and on any given moment, say it was Wednesday, when the people got out there, well there was a bunch of empty cartridge cases on the range that were obviously of the type that the Viet Cong used, so it was direct evidence that they, in fact, used it as a rifle range.

Mr. Caywood: One of the few times that you actually had a rifle practice using the real thing. Col Des Portes, as long as we're talking about security, I was wondering if you could give me some idea of any particular precautions that you take for b(1) if he gets into an area during the course of his mission, that this might occur.

Col Des Portes: You mean like sampling?

Mr. Caywood: Yes.

Col Des Portes:

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Fortunately, the U-2, the design of the U-2, and it's smooth contours, the aircraft itself doesn't accumulate as much radiation as other types of aircraft. For example, the old reciprocating engine aircraft, the cylinders and the walls, some of the walls, used to accumulate a pretty large dose of radiation. Well, we don't have that in the U-2. And we have procedures for washing them down after they've been exposed to eliminate the radiation on the aircraft itself. As I say, we monitor the pilot exposure through the badges. During the Russian's, when the Russians blew off that

100 megaton weapon here back in 1962, the pilots who were then at Eielson were flying sampling missions trying to pick up the debris from that explosion, did get a little warm. One pilot got some rads, I know, he saw a black cloud that he flew into and it happened to be the main residue from that big explosion, and he got I don't know how many rads, but he got a little warm.

Mr. Caywood: Were there any adverse effects?

Col Des Portes: None that we can tell. It was well within the tolerance that medical people claim is acceptable for an individual, but what we try to do then is until he can cool off, keep him away from the sampling program for a while.

Mr. Caywood: I see.

Col Des Portes: This is skipping around a bit, but Colonel Leatherwood talked about the reaction of the British press and the British people to our several months' stay in the United Kingdom. I'd like to point out a little bit to offset that type of information and tell you a little bit about the operation in Australia.

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closed down there in April, my people. My commander there received a gift for the wing from the lord mayor of the city close to our base of operations, received a very fine letter from the chief of staff of the Royal Australian Air Force through General Ryan, and I have a picture here on one of these walls which is one of the pride pictures of Australia. The painting is one done by an aborigine, he's down there and it's, they're real proud of it and it was sent to the wing a couple of years ago as a gift. But this type of relationship existed throughout our stay down there, and it contrasts a little bit from the reception we received in the British Isles.

Mr. Caywood: I can see that. Have you, has your operation contributed directly to any of their own programs that are similar to reconnaissance or sampling?

Col Des Portes: Yes, well the, I don't remember the name of their governmental agency in Australia, but one which is interested in the upper atmosphere both from a weather connotation, but as well from a fallout connotation. We carried for them a little piece of weather equipment which extended their knowledge of our upper air systems

and what not and they benefited from our program considerably because they didn't have any equipment that would accomplish this same mission.

Mr. Caywood: I see. Have you had any other reactions, Col Des Portes, favorable or unfavorable, you might care to mention at this time in addition to our operations in Australia?

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Col Des Portes: Well the, of course

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we were amongst friends. The only reaction I've had from down there was from the strictly military side. As you know, General O'Mera is the Army general who is in charge of that area, and his staff, as well as the Air Force detachment. The reaction of all of those people has been very favorable as far as association with our people down there. I don't think that there's ever been a case brought to my attention where there was anything unfavorable ever said about anybody on an operating location. I think that's a real fine record.

Mr. Caywood: It certainly is.

Col Des Portes: Some of my people admired Australian girls, and I think a couple of them married some when they were in Australia. And this kind of thing takes place, I don't have control over it, but I don't know of any bad incidents that has come out of that either.

Mr. Caywood: Well, as CINCSAC mentioned in his significant tribute here to your organization, Col Des Portes, that evidently you've had almost no unfavorable publicity in regards to your operations, either from a personal point of view or from the organization.

Col Des Portes: Well, that's right. I guess about the only thing that sort of got under my skin a little bit, and I don't say that I didn't deserve it, but I think it was uncalled for and that was the incident I've already mentioned concerning Captain Chang's two U-2 accidents while here at Davis-Monthan.

Mr. Caywood: Right. Col Des Portes, what can you say about close calls or straying near enemy territory in regard to the U-2 operation?

Col Des Portes: Well, this subject, of course, is probably the most sensitive of anything that we've discussed thus far. It's part of our mission for over the course of several

years that we have flown what we call peripheral missions around areas of interest

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There have been a couple of incidents, that I won't go into to any detail, where we've come a little close at times, and I assure you that it was inadvertent. Our missions are very specifically planned as peripheral missions. One incident that has been divulged in the magazines here recently by Mr. McGeorge Bundy, although he doesn't associate it with the 4080th Wing, was how much of a ruckus was created during the Cuban crisis when a U-2 inadvertently flew over the Soviet Union. Well, it's sort of an interesting little sidelight, because I was extremely busy down at Orlando operating

when I got a call from a staff officer at SAC who asked me what in the hell I was doing with a U-2 over Russia? Well, I told him that he'd better ask somebody else because I had my hands full with what I was doing and I didn't know of a U-2 being over Russia. I later found out that one of my pilots on a sampling mission over the North Pole had picked up the wrong star for celestial navigation and it had thrown him off course, and that was the aircraft that caused this, I guess you would say, a minor international issue, although the way I read it in the magazine because of Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Mr. Khrushchev was pretty much concerned over the threat of that U-2 being over the western part of his country. But we do not intentionally overfly the Soviet Union. To the best of my knowledge, we never have. I did make mention of possibly a couple of cases due to the navigational capability of the U-2 where due to different, encountering unexpected winds and this type of thing at altitude where you may have infringed a little bit on the peripheral limitation that we're supposed to have observed.

Mr. Caywood:

Col Des Portes:

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Mr. Caywood: Col Des Portes, Have any of our U-2s encountered hostile fire in addition to the fatality of Major Anderson?

Col Des Portes: We've never had any U-2 aircraft hit. Pilots, I'd better say I know of one incident in North Vietnam where a pilot observed projectiles. We never ascertained positively whether it was from airborne aircraft or ground missile installations, but he observed three projectiles at his altitude on one sortie over there. There are many times that fighters have been scrambled against, apparently against the U-2, both in Cuba and in some cases, peripheral activity. But in the past these fighters haven't had the capability to get to the altitude of the U-2s and we've never had any to actually make contact that I know of.

Mr. Caywood;

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Col Des Portes: Well, that's right. Missions, the people who plan our missions take this into consideration and attempt to avoid any possible threat of this nature.

Mr. Caywood: I see. Col King, we're continuing our discussion here on the background of the 4080th Wing. In reference to my earlier conversation with Col Des Portes, and I understand that you have had probably as much experience as any of the pilots in regard to the requirements for establishing the 4080th and I'd like you to just discuss, in your own words, the very early training experience and then come right on up through the current period, if you would.

LTC King: All right sir. I'm presently assigned as the Deputy Squadron Commander of the 4028th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron. My name is Joe R. King, Lt Col. I was assigned to the 4080th at the outset of the program, Turner Air Force Base in 1956. I was, prior to that, in the 508th Fighter Wing which turned into the 4080th. The project was extremely secret to begin with and before we could be briefed, we had to run special clearances and have all of our background investigated before they would let us in on any portion of the U-2

program. Although prior to this, while we were obtaining the clearances, we were fitted for high altitude pressure suits, and at that time we used the MC-1 suit which was very inferior to the suits that we have today. They were a pressure breathing suit whereas today we don't have that problem. So because of that, many people who would have been in the program, because of their experience and background, did not make it because they could not physically handle the suit at high altitudes. These suits were issued to us at Wright-Patterson, fitted, and we ran the pressure chamber. In those days, they didn't know probably near as much as we know now about high altitude flying, and it was thought that we should wear these suits for a

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Mr. Caywood: As far as this, Col King, insofar as the physical stamina is concerned, with these early suits, did it seem to be certain types of individuals who were successful in this insofar as weight or general physical configurations? Could you answer that?

LTC King: No, I don't think the weight had too much to do with it, although the stature or the physical shape of the individual did because of the fitting of the suit. Although the big thing that caused most of them to not make it was having possibly not anything wrong with their heart, but not having as strong a heart as some of the others. The other suit made at Carswell in the later, the other suits that we got, the partial pressure suits, which had the breathing bladder in the chest and probably most of the people who did not make the program initially would have made it with the new breathing bladder that we have today. In fact, now we have practically no failures in the chamber, probably due to that reason. In this period at Turner, the 4025th Squadron was equipped with B-57Ds. The 4028th was waiting for aircraft to be delivered, the U-2, and we flew T-33s for approximately six months. And in the beginning of 1957, possibly in December of 1956, four staff members of the 4028th were sent TDY to Broom Lake out on the atomic testing grounds in Nevada, north of Indian Springs, to become familiar with the operation of the U-2 and to check out the aircraft. In January of 1957, ten crews were selected to go out for their initial checkout to be upgraded to combat ready status and become IPs to check out the rest of the crews when

we came to Laughlin Air Force Base. I was fortunate to be selected, one of the crews, there were ten crews to go out in January of 1957, and got my training in March of 1957. These ten crews, who were the IPs to check out the rest of the people, were completed in April and May of 1957 at Broom Lake.

Mr. Caywood: Just off hand, Col King, would you recall any of the other pilots' names at that time, of these original ten?

LTC King: Yes, there was at this time Col Haupt, he was at that time Captain, there were Lieutenant Boyd, Lieutenant Graves, and Captain Levitt . . .

Mr. Caywood: That's okay if you can't remember them all, I was just interested and I think it's good that you remember that many, but this will give us an opportunity to follow-up on some other aspects of these individuals.

LTC King: Another one was Lieutenant Brown who is still with us, as a major. This was about eight years ago. To get to the U-2 aircraft, it was new at the time and not only the aircraft was new and untested, but the idea of flying at these altitudes was different to most of us. Probably the medics knew more about it than we, of course, but they had quite a few things to learn too, as it turned out. For instance, originally they thought that these pressure suits should fit skin tight all over and it was found out later that probably if they were a little looser, they were just as effective and quite a bit more comfortable. Originally, prior to ascending to altitudes above 50,000 feet, we had to breathe pure oxygen for a period of two hours prior to takeoff. Now this has been reduced to 30 minutes because they found out that at 30 minutes, about 90 percent of the nitrogen is taken out of your body. That was a little bit of strain, if you figure that you fly eight hours and pre-breathe in that suit for two hours prior to that, you get a little bit thirsty and hungry before you get down. Which brings up another point, the crew rest and our special diet that we had prepared for us to eat prior to our flights, I remember one incidence, I think it was Captain Levitt, was fifteen minutes late starting his crew rest and his mission was cancelled. Other things they did while we were there was to wear red lenses to improve our night vision for night takeoffs. They kept all the lights on the base turned off until the airplane took off at the time it was scheduled to take off.

Mr. Caywood: Col King, excuse me. Could you give us some details in regard to your special diet?

LTC King: Special diets consisted of high protein, steak and eggs were the usual diet. Orange juice and milk, a cup of coffee if you liked. I didn't use much coffee because it's too hard on the bladder before you got down.

Mr. Caywood: Right. Did you have to sleep much in this training program?

LTC King: Required twelve hours of crew rest prior to our briefing was the usual eight hours sleep. Normally, our takeoffs were midnight, one o'clock in the morning for a day/night mission, or night/day mission, so we had to take sleeping pills normally to get our crew rest, going to sleep at two or three o'clock in the afternoon. Those sleeping pills usually wore off for me after about five hours. I was up, wandering around, too early, but some people seem to use them. I never have used them myself. I might mention a few things about the U-2 aircraft that were different than they are today. The U-2 was equipped with a J-57 dash 37 at that time. Which is basically the same engine in that we have today, but quite a few differences in them. It made it a little hairier in those days to fly it. One is that it threw oil all over the canopy, and you, usually on a flight. When you came down, your suit was pretty well oiled up, your canopy had a film of oil on it, it distorted your view in landing, which made it very difficult to see. This was corrected when they came out with the dash 31 engine. J-57 dash 31 which is used today. It eliminated the oil, it eliminated also the many flame-outs that we had at high altitude in those days. I can remember one mission I flew, it took off at 12:30 at night, it was dark and it was cloudy. I got up to about 58,000 feet and quit. It was about my third mission. I'd never had a flame-out before in my life, and it was night and I had to come down to 35,000 feet for a relight and I happened to be in the clouds. So I was a confused trainee that night. But I got it fired up and back up I went and things were going pretty good except when I got to 58,000 feet, it quit again. Back down and relit this time, wasn't quite so bad, and tried it one more time and made it, and completed the mission. These flame-outs, in those days, were not unusual. You get the airplane too high then and you would have rough air or you started the flow of air through the intake, the engine would quit.

Mr. Caywood: Col King, about how long did you operate the U-2 with the J-57 dash 37 prior to its being replaced by the dash 31 engine?

LTC King:

We operated the dash 37 engines for a period of about three years. Up until 1960. But during this period we were phasing in with the dash 31 engine and that brought up another little story that . . . You see the 31 was different from the dash 37 engine. You can reach men flow or men pressure ratio between the intake and the exhaust of the engine on the J-31 and you did not reach this on the dash 37. Rather that was a dash 31. So that if you throttle back at high altitude to below MPR, the engine would quit. Well, we didn't know this. Nobody had ever told us, so on the dash 37s that we'd been flying you could come back to idle and it would not quit, shouldn't quit. So we had many more flame-outs until we found out what was causing that which took the better part of a couple months. Most of this, the dash 31 experience happened

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Mr. Caywood:

Yes, you can continue right on then, Col King, with continuity, step by step, you next . . .

LTC King:

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Mr. Caywood:

About how long a time would you say that was, Col King?

LTC King:

Well, that would be for a period of about six months. This was a combined effort at the ranch on checking our maintenance people out as well as our pilots. It was done by, the maintenance people were checked out by the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation personnel who built and maintained the aircraft. The pilots were checked out by a detachment of Air Force personnel out at March Air Force Base.

Mr. Caywood: Do you recall, Col King, any personal experiences among yourself and your fellow pilots there that would be of interest, human interest type of experiences?

LTC King: Well, there were quite a few there. A lot of them wouldn't want to put it in print, I don't think. We had very adequate quarters to live in and the food was excellent. We had a cook out there who was quite a character. He was good to, put a good meal on the table for you though, every time you went to eat. People were very congenial that were there. Normally, we'd only work five days a week and we had the weekend usually in the LA area. Some of those were a little hairy.

Mr. Caywood: Were you observed at all times there, Col King, by a medical staff as to your reactions, physical reactions?

LTC King: We had some of the top SAC medical personnel there to keep a close check on us. Two flight surgeons at times, and only about 14 people to look after. We were pretty well taken care of. Any time we left the place out there, they told us that they had people following us to see where we went and what we did. I kinda doubt that.

Mr. Caywood: In regard to the training program there at the ranch, was there any adverse developments as far as physical conditions were concerned or did the program come through successfully in most aspects?

LTC King: Most aspects of the program did come through successfully. We had no pilots suffer from any ill effects they received from the altitude flying. The suit was, the pressure suit was adequate, although there have been many improvements made as far as comfort and reliability since that time. The oxygen system on the aircraft was, at that time, was a little antique. There's been improvements made on that. another improvement that was made on the airplane was when it was originally built, it had very peculiar stalling characteristics on landing. One wing would stall out quite a considerable amount of time before the other one, and when you were trying to land, it would try to hit the ground before the wheels. A lot of times it did. We found out through experimenting that by putting stall strips on the leading edge of the wing, that it would tend to correct these bad characteristics in the stall of the aircraft so that they have improved that to where now the stalling characteristics of the aircraft are excellent.

Mr. Caywood: I see. During this period of time, in your initial checkouts there at the ranch, Col King, did you and the

other pilots do any photography missions or was this purely checkout in the aircraft itself?

LTC King:

Well initially it was checkout in the aircraft and then we flew photography missions. They were training photography missions rather than operational photography missions. We had the same equipment at that time as we're using today. Same photography equipment. We have tried to develop another, or we've experimented with another development that they've come up with on a supposedly a better piece of equipment for photography but we've never been able to make it work. But the equipment that we refer to as the B configuration was used at the ranch at that time. Considered the best piece of equipment that we have.

Mr. Caywood:

If you'd just continue right on then, Col King, after this initial checkout and your return then to, I presume, beginning the expansion of the wing to its full operational requirement. Continue right on here with continuity.

LTC King:

All right. After we had the people who went out and completed their checkout, we had by that time acquired

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This was in June 1957. very highly qualified pilots had been recruited from other units, mainly fighter units, and SAC and Air Force, were waiting there to be trained in the U-2. And the training program presented quite a few problems. Since we had not adhered to many of the regulations that were published regarding training, particularly in SAC, and flying regulations of the Federal Aviation Administration, so we had to revise our training program to a great degree upon moving to Laughlin. Also we had a lot more help.

Mr. Caywood:

You more or less had to build a new training program there?

LTC King:

Yes sir, this is true when we moved to Laughlin. Basically, the basic training features were left in the program, but you had to add other features to comply with flying regulations that we didn't have to out in an isolated area. It made it a little bit more difficult for the pilot, cause he had more to do than we did at the ranch. We started this training program with the IPs that we had in September, August and September of 1957. In October of 1957 we were committed to two operational locations. Operating loca-

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short on personnel for training since the combat ready people had to be selected from these ten who were already combat ready, and left us a little bit short of

instructors and aircraft. Although we did get more aircraft by then.

Mr. Caywood: These were the initial two operating locations, right?

LTC King:

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Mr. Caywood: About how many of your people, Col King, were in place at these operating locations, how many of your IPs had to be taken out of your training program to be in place at these three?

LTC King: I was sent out originally to Plattsburgh to be commander of that detachment and I had three other IPs with me there. We had one man, a pilot who we had upgraded to the point of being ready, that was Captain Purdue, who is retiring here next month. The other location was similar at the same time. We had two aircraft in each place, and four pilots counting the commander.

Mr. Caywood: So it placed a considerable heavy workload on the remaining IPs there at Laughlin to continue your upgrade program?

LTC King: That is very true. I think at this point I'd rather have been at Plattsburgh than Laughlin. The training program at Laughlin, through trial and error and suggestions by people and complying with the regulations, was ironed out in approximately two to three months and they had a pretty smooth training program there in the latter part of 1957.

Mr. Caywood: At this point, Col King, would you comment on the part that Lockheed technicians played in this early training program, if any, at Laughlin?

LTC King: The technicians from Lockheed were strictly maintenance and no active part in the training of the pilots. I'm sure that they did have a considerable amount of say so in maintaining the aircraft because we had, no one knew much about it because they'd only have five or six months training on the job out at the ranch. And we had to train new people in maintenance also at this time. It was a big training program going on as well as trying to find out a lot of new things about the airplane that we didn't know.

Mr. Caywood: About how many people would you say were involved here, I'm speaking of your wing, military personnel, in addition to the pilots?

LTC King: Well, the wing had a different setup at that time than it has now in that your line personnel and maintenance

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with the sampling, at the same time, would be a dif-

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Mr. Caywood: Col King, could you tell me when the U-2s first began photographic missions?

LTC King: You mean practice missions or operational missions?

Mr. Caywood: Operational.

LTC King: Operational missions were started in 1955, '58 was the first, I believe, the 4080th ran an operational photography mission.

Mr. Caywood: In what area would that have been?

LTC King:

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Mr. Caywood: But some aircraft have a dual purpose?

LTC King: Yes.

Mr. Caywood: I would be interested, you mentioned that evidently we had picked up or have established a fourth OL in Argentina. about that OL-4.

LTC King:

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Mr. Caywood: Your relations there with the Argentines, your Argentine counterpart was very good I take it, good cooperation?

LTC King: Yes, we were on this combined civilian/military base. Probably the best airfield that they had in Argentina at the time. We worked with the Argentine Air Force and were well pleased with the cooperation that we got from the people.



Mr. Caywood: Is this program continuing at Argentina?

LTC King:

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went back periodically, two times a year, in fact the other OLs were closed down to where we operated only at particular times of the year, usually it was May and November for a period of 30 days running profiles on altitudes, latitudes, covering the entire latitude as much as we could of the world.

Mr. Caywood: What two OLS were these?

LTC King: The other OL we used was Eielson, was our most northern OL. We had one at Laughlin. We would go to Ramey, the mid-latitudes, and we would connect with them from Australian latitudes. We sampled out of Hawaii, Guam, we had one at Panama for quite a while, we had a sampling unit in England. They've been just about all over the world.

Mr. Caywood: Right. Now, Col King, in keeping some part of continuity here in the buildup of the 4080th Wing, what time period would you say you probably had reached the peak of your expansion and you felt that the wing was, its UMD in other words, peaked and you were full operational configurations?

LTC King: That was reached in the summer of '58. In fact, the wing was considered combat ready at that time, had the qualifications, number of combat ready crews, and at that time, some of us received spot promotions, in June 1958. Its a good indication of the wing's combat ready status.

Mr. Caywood: That's right. Now you had mentioned earlier that you more or less had to build a complete new training program. During this period then, had you actually published manuals and other publications that gave you a feeling that you really had, more or less, a primary SAC training program?

LTC King: Yes, we adapted our training to the SAC training program, in accordance with their regulations, SAC Regulation 51-19 is the initial training phase which we had a supplement or a numbered entry. It was under SAC Regulation 51-19 which covered the requirements for initial checkout in the U-2. That's low altitude work. Planning and taking off, simulations, and GCAs, that type transition work.



Mr. Caywood: Col King, you mentioned SAC Regulation 51-19 was your basic training regulation?

LTC King: Yes, that was the basic training regulation for the first four flights of a new trainee. After that, after he completed the requirements of 51-19, then we operated under SAC Regulation 50-43, which was crew upgrading. That was a much longer period of time, and high altitude flights of a longer duration, included training in all the equipment in the aircraft. That's sampling, ELINT, photography, weather, data that we have collected from time to time, high altitude weather data. This was complete training. When he finished the requirements of 50-43, he was considered a combat ready crew.

Mr. Caywood: Yes. Could you just perhaps recapitulate, Col King, the training of a typical U-2 pilot from the time that you received this man at Laughlin until he was considered ready to perform his regular mission?

LTC King: After we had our training program pretty well in hand, it hasn't changed much from that time until now. There have been some minor changes, but basically it's the same process and starts out with the selection of your trainee, pilot. Our desires are kind of hard to meet, as most people are, I guess. We would like to have an experienced pilot, we say by experienced, in the neighborhood of 25 hundred to three thousand flying hours; have flown various types aircraft, B-47 experience is very good, fighter type aircraft experience. If we get a man who is both, we feel we are very fortunate. Of course, a man's character and his, how well he's been rated, is another thing we consider in selecting. But these pilots must come to the 4080th, be interviewed by various people in the 4080th, and the wing commander, and then there is a meeting of the people who have interviewed the individual to decide whether or not he be accepted in the program. This is done right at the 4080th level.

Mr. Caywood: Is that a selection board?

LTC King: Well, it's not necessarily a board as far as individuals, but it's a board as far as job, people who are holding a job at that particular time. You see so many of us are TDY, that today I may be the DCO and tomorrow I might be a Deputy Squadron Commander of the 4028th. So whoever is wearing the hat that particular day is the man who reports, is the man, but usually it's an experienced individual who's been in the unit for quite some time and has flown the aircraft quite a bit. After the selection, then the man is sent to high altitude training, suit, pressure suit training, and he

runs his suit, gets it fitted, and runs it in the chamber to determine whether or not he can hack the program. If he has tendencies toward claustrophobia, that suit will definitely bring it out. The things, or if he had something that didn't show up in some of his past physical examinations, that would probably show up.

Mr. Caywood: This phase determines his physical requirements, whether he passes or not?

LTC King: Right. If accepted, then he goes, it the medical chamber says that he is qualified, then he is assigned to the unit. He has all the requirements to meet after he gets to the unit. He has to go to Stead Air Force Base and complete the survival course, one of the requirements, if not, we send him when he gets here. We then send him through a field training detachment, academic ground school, on the aircraft. But prior to flying the U-2, we have our support aircraft, T-33. You must be qualified in the T-33 prior to starting his training in the U-2 aircraft. We do several things with the T-33. We determine the man's capabilities, generally as a pilot, we determine his capability in instrument flying, we familiarize him with sight procedures at checkout, and he become acquainted with our method of operation in the wing which is different than most wings, squadrons.

Mr. Caywood: In other words, he becomes skilled as a T-33 pilot prior to going into U-2s?

LTC King: This is correct. And after he's completed his checkout in the T-33, he will continue to stay current and fly the T-33, but then he takes up his training in the U-2. Now this training consists of several hours, I believe about 30 hours, of sextant, training on the sextant, navigation. To most pilots, particularly fighter pilots, that's new. The sextant in the aircraft we use for navigation . . .

(NOTE: Tape runs out here.)